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**POWER DYNAMICS
IN THE LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT OF
EMPLOYEE-FRIENDLY FLEXIBLE WORKING**

by

Sadia Nadeem

Submitted to
Cass Business School, City of London
(Formerly City University Business School)
Faculty of Management

In fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration to the Librarian

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the possibilities for the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working, through understanding power dynamics between the individual and the organisation.

It is argued that changes in the demographic composition of the workforce are altering the needs, attitudes and expectations of employees. At the same time, organisations are increasing the use of flexibility due to direct business benefits, and also because of increasing internal and external pressures to enable employees to balance their work and personal lives. The study discusses whether the resulting increase in the use of employee-friendly flexible working is a long-term change. The focus of discussion is the negotiating power of the employee versus the employer, the dynamics of which identify possibilities for a permanent change.

Empirical research relies on employee survey and management interviews in two case-study organisations that are users of flexible working. Findings support the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working. Individuals from newer demographic groups and those with scarce resources (are perceived to) have greater negotiating power. However, the power of all employees is increasing because of a strong and unilateral desire for flexibility, and because a majority is willing to make sacrifices to accomplish their will to work flexibly. The groups with stronger negotiating power have initiated the work-life debate, but in doing so, they have increased the power of all employees through developing new models, creating the atmosphere of a social movement, lowering ideological barriers, and generating knowledge of new possibilities and aspirations. Favourable external pressures improve the position of employees.

The original research framework presents a summary of employee-employer power dynamics that are likely to lead towards the long-term development of policies, and is the basis of the empirical research. A second framework based on the research findings explains how and why organisations differ in providing flexible working, and why this difference may continue to exist in the future. Triggering forces that have altered attitudes and policies in the UK are then chronologically charted to summarise past changes and develop arguments for the future. Together these three key features – the two models and the summary diagram – enable a stimulating debate on the past, present and future of work-life policies in the UK.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays the foundation of the thesis, and is organised into five sections:

1. Brief history of the project
2. Research objectives and outcomes
3. Existing literature and rationale for the present study
4. Contribution to knowledge
5. Structure of the thesis

After a brief history of the project, the main objectives of the research are outlined, and the principal findings are summarised to show how the project meets its objectives. In the literature review, the lack of existing literature on the topic underlines the significance of the study. The fourth section presents the main contributions of the present study to the existing body of knowledge. Finally, the organisation of chapters in the thesis is discussed.

1.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

This project is sponsored by the Strategic Remuneration Research Centre (SRRC¹). The topic of the project originated in a meeting of the SRRC sponsors in July 1996. In a discussion session of some 20 senior managers, one of the key areas highlighted was the changes in career and lifestyle aspirations of individuals' towards 2010, and the likely impact of these on the standard 'employee-employer' relationship.

A pilot study was carried out at the end of 1996, as a result of which the complete study was sponsored in October 1997. The topic of the project has developed and evolved since. Several presentations have been made to the SRRC during the last four years.

¹ SRRC is a research-based learning network of around 30 leading 'blue chip' enterprises, with the mission to investigate and model remuneration as a strategic lever in the management of people in enterprises. The Centre is taking a fresh look at the changing concepts of rewards and the way rewards can be used to attract, motivate and retain talented people capable of delivering successful business strategies. The Centre's agenda is defined by real world of business, but draws strength from rigorous academic research, and is linked to the City University Business School.

Thus, the topic selected, work-life balance, is relevant to the business community. Its significance is also reflected in changes in policy and legislation over the last decade, and by its repeated occurrence in newspapers, magazines and journals. Thorough research from academia is much needed – the study contributes in this direction.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

This study focuses on the possibilities for the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working, through understanding the power dynamics between the individual and the organisation. This can be divided into two objectives. The first is to explore whether the growing significance of work-life balance of employees is a secular trend, highlighted by the changing demographic composition of the workforce, exaggerated by the sustained economic peak (1993-2001), and a genuine reflection of changing employee and employer attitudes, which reflect developments in work in western industrialised societies, particularly the UK. The second objective is to understand power relationships between individuals and organisations that influence the development of work-life policies. Thus, how the policies evolve, and the extent to which they develop, depends on the power dynamics.

The research conclusions are discussed in Chapter 9 and 10. In summary, the findings endorse the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working. This is because flexibility is strongly desired by employees, and they are ready to make sacrifices and adjustments to achieve flexibility. While changing demographics, and non-substitutability of employees (linked to skill shortages and the economic peak) have influenced employees' ability to demand flexibility, the changes initiated by these groups have increased the power of all employees. This collective influence of employees is affected by the development of new models, and the creation of an atmosphere akin to a social movement. The major change is the knowledge of new possibilities and aspirations, which lowers ideological barriers. These evolutions will make employee-friendly flexibility a part of post-industrial ways of working.

Organisations are willing to accommodate employee demands for flexible working because of increasing business benefits, for example, 24/7 hours working and technological advances. Resistance is also lowered due to increasing external pressures

from multiple sources (e.g. legislation, social and ethical responsibility). However, organisational responses may differ.

1.3 EXISTING LITRATURE AND RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

There is a deficiency of academic research on the topic of work-life, and existing literature at the beginning of this project (1997) was fragmented, often narrow in focus. The following paragraphs explain influences of bodies of literature that stimulated thinking in the initial phases of a project which has its origins in a discussion session of the business community. In later phases of the project, analysis of empirical data led to additional theoretical concepts. These are discussed in Section 1.4.

The review of existing literature on changes in career and lifestyle aspirations of individuals', and the likely impact of these on employee-employer relationships (as outlined by the SRRC consortium), led to three bodies of existing literature:

- A large collection on work-family conflict from the field of psychology
- Social statistics (and their analysis) on the changing demographic composition of the workforce, the demand and use for flexible working, and changes in attitudes.
- Management literature on the costs and benefits of addressing or ignoring the work-life interface, from the organisational and employee perspective.

These are reviewed in Chapter 2 and 3.

In the light of the literature review, the focus of the research shifted towards work-life policies. Flexible working options that allow employees to balance career and lifestyle aspirations were selected as the policies which would be studied during the research. These are labelled as employee-friendly flexible working policies. They were considered more important than other work-life policies because of their popularity among employees. Managers perceived that they were a low-cost accommodation of work-life needs, which allowed them to be available to a broader spectrum of employees, and less dependent on economic fluctuations. Flexible working was also peculiar among work-life policies because it was the most complex to implement.

Literature on ‘time’ and industrialisation (Thompson, 1967; Bridges, 1996; Bravermann, 1974; Adams, 1995; DEMOS, 1995) highlighted the potential of these policies to create a shift from industrial to post-industrial ways of working.

The literature review also revealed the absence of any directly relevant literature, or suitable frameworks to understand the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working policies. Thus, a research framework was developed which brought together ideas from the three sets of literature mentioned above. The framework shows that changes in individuals and organisations are supporting the development of work-life policies. However, the needs and desires of employees and employers do not always match, and in the case of a mismatch, the availability of policies depends on their relative negotiating power. These power dynamics are the key to understand whether work-life policies will be a short- or long-term trend.

Thus, understanding the relative power and influence of the employee and employers became the focal point of the study. Factors that were found to influence power dynamics in the work-life arena were summarised and theoretical concepts of power were introduced (Hickson et. al, 1971; Giddens, 1979; Jo-Hatch, 1995; Oliver, 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). Consideration was given to internal factors such as increasing employee demand and the changing nature of work which has made it possible for the organisation to offer flexibility. Legislative change, economic cycle stages, and increasing social awareness were the key external factors considered to increase pressure on organisations to improve the harmonisation of work and personal life of their employees.

Since this project started (1997), the interest in work-life balance of employees has increased, as has the relevant literature and available national data on work-life and family-friendly policies in the UK. This literature is not discussed here or reviewed in Chapter 2 and 3, since it did not influence the research questions, design or methodology. However, it is integrated with the findings in the concluding discussions (Chapter 9 and Chapter 10).

1.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The research contributes to knowledge on theoretical and practical levels. Concentrating on the under-researched topic of work-life, two frameworks are presented. The first (Figure 3.1) is based on the literature review. It brings together existing fragmented literature on the topic, gives structure to it, and extends it to understand intra-organisational dynamics that are likely to lead towards the long-term development of work-life policies. The organisational differences framework (Figure 9.1) makes it possible to understand differences between organisations in providing work-life policies. The two frameworks are aided by chronological charting (Figure 10.1) of the triggering forces that have brought changes in attitudes and policies in the work-life arena. Together, these three key features enable a rich understanding of the past, present and future of work-life policies.

The main distinguishing feature of this study is the central role of ‘power’ – which is a key feature in both frameworks – in trying to understand the long-term development of policies. In attempting to understand power, the study supports the idea of Hardy and Clegg (1996) that

Power requires understanding in its diversity even as it resists explanation in terms of a singular theory. (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 636)

The project started exploring power dynamics through different theories and concepts of power (Hickson et al., 1971; Giddens, 1979; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). The major finding of this research project is the role of ideology/knowledge as the basis of power (Lukes, 1974; Gramsci, 1971; Ranson et al. 1980; Foucault, 1977, 1980) in hindering the growth of better work-life balance policies.

The research has also underlined the vague nature of the term ‘flexibility’, and problems and controversies arising in research due to this reason. With regard to methodology, the research supports the advantages of case-study results, especially for the study of power relationships in organisations (Eisenhardt, 1989). Many of the power dynamics were understood because of this methodology.

The topic of this project is closely linked to policy and practice. Thus, recommendations are made for policy, which include considering possibilities for a shorter working week, and facilitating change in culture, attitudes and ideologies.

The study is based on research in large organisations, and though some findings, e.g. the existence of ideological barriers, are more generalisable, others may be restricted to large organisations. It is also important to stress that in general research the term work-life policies is used to refer to a variety of options. Empirical work here focused on the use of employee-friendly flexible working as a work-life policy. Finally, the research was carried out in the UK. Some of the findings e.g. the organisational response framework and the existence of ideological barriers, can be used to understand changes in other societies; a few, though, may be less generalisable. The degree of transferability is higher for developed industrialised societies than to countries where the economy, society and (work) culture have less in common with the UK.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. **Chapter 1** outlines the general research area and research objectives. **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3** lay the foundations of the research by **analysing the literature** which influenced research design. Chapter 2 concentrates on the work-life interface, and the employee perspective on flexible working. In this review, studies of work-family conflict and family-friendly policies highlight the costs and benefits of giving due attention to employees' work-life balance. Associations are established between the increasing desire for balance, and changes in demographics and at work. The changing composition of the workforce and the use/desire for flexible working among these more diverse and skilled employees of the future are analysed through surveys.

Chapter 3 provides the organisational perspective on flexibility. It establishes that increasing use of flexibility is not only because of labour market pull, but also due to direct business benefits on the part of the firm.

Chapter 3 also presents **the research framework**. Negotiating power is the focus of this framework, with the underlying idea that, if the needs and desires of employees and

employers do not match, long-term development of flexible working is likely to depend on the power of one party against the other. This chapter expands the idea of power – theories and concepts which are considered to influence work-life power dynamics are discussed. The chapter concludes by elaborating the research questions.

Chapter 4 outlines the **research strategy and methodology**, and the process of fieldwork. Various options available to carry out the research are discussed, and the reasons for the final choice are explained. Tools of data collection – the Employee Survey, Management Interviews, and Organisational Questionnaire – are discussed in detail. The process and timetable of fieldwork is laid out.

The next four chapters present empirical findings from the case studies. **Chapter 5** discusses **survey results from Company A**. Employee attitudes towards work-life balance, types of flexible working policies, work-family conflict, and negotiating power are analysed. In this discussion, the influence of the transforming demographics and changes at work on employee attitudes are given particular attention. Also, the opinion of employee groups with perceived higher intra-organisational negotiating power – namely higher educated, higher income, managers and professionals – is highlighted. In so doing, we examine whether the employee desire for work-life balance and flexible working is likely to increase in the future, and if so, whether employees will have the power to influence organisational policies.

Chapter 6 continues the discussion of **Company A** findings, focusing on the negotiating power argument. It largely draws upon management interviews, but some survey findings are also presented. Internal and external pressures on organisations to accommodate work-life needs of employees are discussed. The aim is to understand whether this is a secular, long-term trend.

Chapters 7 and 8 present survey and interview findings of **Company B**, following the same pattern as Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 9 summaries the **similarities and differences** between the findings for Company A and B. Parts of the surveys from the two companies are compared with relevant findings from national surveys carried out since the start of the project.

Following the research framework, the chapter then highlights the main findings of the project and integrates them with the work of other scholars, commenting on whether the initial assumptions were validated, and if and how the research framework facilitates the understanding of long-term development in work-life policies. Factors influencing power dynamics are discussed, emphasising how they point towards a continuing development of employee-friendly flexible working. This chapter presents a new ‘organisational response’ framework, which helps understand differences in policies offered by organisations. In so doing, it is intended to stimulate thinking on whether the long-term development of work-life policies will influence all organisations, or whether some organisations will be able to defy internal and external pressures.

Chapter 10 is the final chapter. On the basis of knowledge gathered throughout the project, the factors that have led to developments in the work-life arena are chronologically charted. Positive outcomes for the future are predicted on the basis of a growing momentum, and knowledge of new possibilities. Theories of power/knowledge are discussed to support the argument.

The thesis concludes by stressing the need for a macro-change, and outlining recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

WORK-LIFE AND THE EMPLOYEE

This chapter and Chapter 3 provide a literature review of the research issues. The aim of these chapters is exploration and identification of the research area which led to the development of the research framework.

This chapter provides a review of the employee perspective; the employer perspective follows in the next chapter. The chapter is divided into four sections:

1. The work-family interface
2. Family friendly organisations
3. Employees of the future and their expectations
4. Performance implications and rewards

To understand the changes in individuals and organisations, the first section examines the work-family interface to establish if, and why, this interface is likely to play a significant role in organising work in organisations of the future. The nature and impact of, and implications for, family friendly policies are examined in the next section. Increasing diversity and the changing values of the workforce are discussed in the third section, indicating why these are likely to increase the significance of work-life balance. This is followed by a brief discussion on the wider performance implications and benefits of family-friendly policies.

The literature reviewed in the various sections belongs to different disciplines. This variety of origins was found essential to understand the complexities of the problem, and the multi-disciplinarily roots add richness to the final framework. This characteristic of the review also signifies gaps in the literature, and/or the lack of an overarching framework to understand the long-term future of work-life policies. The roots of the literature reviewed are indicated in the sections which have a stronger reliance on particular disciplines.

2.1 THE WORK-FAMILY INTERFACE

This section looks at various studies on the work-family interface, work-family conflict and family-work conflict. It is an attempt to explore how employees respond to tensions on this interface, the cost of employees' reaction, what organisations can do to support employees, and the possible advantages to employers and employees alike due to organisational support around this interface. Effects on employee commitment, performance, and motivation due to changes in work-family interface, and the price organisations may have to pay as a result of ignoring this interface through stress, absenteeism, and turnover are reported. This section relies mostly on studies carried out in the discipline of psychology, since a large body of literature existed on this topic in this discipline.

2.1.1 Roots of the problem

Traditionally the study of the two most central realms of an individual's life, work and family, have been conducted independently. More recently, work-family interface has captured the interest of a growing number of work and family researchers. This interest is focused on the conflict which may exist between work and family roles, and the resulting consequences of this conflict.

To understand work-family conflict and family-work conflict we make use of 'Role Theory'. Role theory proposes that individuals experience role conflict when presented with incompatible demands where compliance with the expectations of one role makes performance of the other more difficult (Katz & Kahn, 1978). From family-work and work-family perspectives, this type of conflict reflects the degree to which role responsibilities in work and family domains are incompatible - that is, "participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in family (work) role" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, pp. 77).

Although several sources of work-family conflict and family-work conflict have been identified, most researchers agree that the general demands of a role, the time devoted to a given role, and the strain produced by a given role are domain elements of work-

family conflict and family-work conflict (Bachrach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991; Cooke & Rousseau, 1984; Greenhaus, 1988; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Kahn and Byosiore, 1992; Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980, Vodanoff, 1988).

The general demands of a role refer to the responsibilities, requirements, expectations, duties and commitments associated with a given role. (These terms have been used interchangeably throughout the literature). Time-based conflict occurs when the amount of time devoted to either the work or family role interferes with performing responsibilities in the other role. Similarly, strain-based conflict occurs when strain created by one role interferes with performing the other role. For example, irritability and anxiety created by work interferes with performing family duties and vice versa.

Therefore, Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian (1996) defined work-family conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with the performance of family-related responsibilities. Conversely, family-work conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with the performance of work-related responsibilities.

2.1.2 Studies on work-family conflict and family-work conflict

Work-family conflict affects the quality of both work and family life. It is, therefore, important that organisations understand the role of individuals at home and at work, make provisions to help the employee balance these two main domains of their lives, and understand the consequences of ignoring the work-family interface.

Work-family conflict and family-work conflict need to be analysed from two perspectives - the employee's and the employer's. This section considers the employee's viewpoint through employee surveys on this topic.

Research on work and family have linked work-family conflict and family-work conflict to reduced organisational commitment, decreased job and life satisfaction, poor quality of life, and reduced marital satisfaction. It also results in loss of productivity.

absenteeism, presentism¹, intention to leave and increased turnover. It can increase stress and psychological distress and has been linked to poor physical health, depression, and burnout (Table 2.1).

The negative consequences of work-family conflict and family-work conflict are evident from research. The studies, though they succeed in establishing the negative consequences of work-family conflict and family-work conflict for organisations and individuals, have their limitations in their ability to generalise about these effects. The operationalisation of work-family conflict and family-work conflict varies from study to study. Some studies have used single-item measures of the constructs (e.g. Rice, Frone and McFarlin, 1992 and Voydanoff, 1988) while others have used multi-item measures (e.g. Adam, King and King, 1996). Sample sizes vary from just over a hundred to several thousand. Also, the nature of samples are diverse (e.g. male executives in Judge, Boudreau, and Bretz, 1994) and therefore many studies do not cover a large, heterogeneous, representative sample of employed adults.

The key constructs² in these studies are, however, related to each other. For example, most empirical research supports a negative (and reciprocal) relationship between job stress and job satisfaction (see Kahn and Byosiére, 1992, for a review), and a significant relationship exists between job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Tait, Padgett, and Baldwin, 1989; Judge and Watanabe, 1993; Schmitt and Bedeian, 1982).

Therefore, despite the inability of these studies (in Table 2.1) to produce generalisable findings, many of them are supportive of one another, and we can conclude that work-family conflict and family-work conflict have significant costs for organisations and individuals.

¹ Physically present at place of work but mentally absent or non-productive so that the presence can be equated to absence.

² Main idea being analysed, e.g. life-satisfaction, job-satisfaction, stress, etc.

DECREASED ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth, 1992	BURNOUT Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley, 1991 Burke, 1988 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996
REDUCED JOB SATISFACTION Adams, King and King, 1996 Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley, 1991 Burke, 1988 Duxbury and Higgins, 1991 Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992 Judge and Watanabe, 1993 Judge, Boudreau and Bretz, 1994 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth, 1992 Rice, Frone, and McFarlin, 1992 Thomas and Ganster, 1995	REDUCED LIFE SATISFACTION Adams, King and King, 1996 Bedeian, Burke and Moffett, 1988 Duxbury and Higgins, 1991 Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985 Gutek, Searle and Klepa, 1991 Judge and Watanabe, 1993 Judge, Boudreau and Bretz, 1994 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth, 1992 Parasuraman, Greenhaus and Granrose, 1992 Voydanoff, 1988
REDUCED QUALITY OF FAMILY LIFE Duxbury and Higgins, 1991 Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985 Gutek, Searle and Klepa, 1991 Higgins and Duxbury, 1992 Higgins, Duxbury and Irving, 1992 Jones and Fletcher, 1993 Lewis and Cooper, 1988a, 1988b Voydanoff, 1988 Wagner and Neal, 1994	POOR PHYSICAL HEALTH Burke, 1988 Frone, Barnes, and Farrell, 1994 Frone, Russell and Barnes, 1996 Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992, 1997 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 Thomas and Ganster, 1995
DEPRESSION Burke, 1988 Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992, 1997 Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 Thomas and Ganster, 1995	INCREASED STRESS Frone, Russell, and Cooper, 1992 Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1986 Jones and Fletcher, 1993 Lewis and Cooper, 1988a, 1988b Parasuraman, Greenhaus and Granrose, 1992 Wagner and Neal, 1994
PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS Burke, 1993 Frone, Barnes, and Farrell, 1994 Frone, Russell and Barnes, 1996 Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992 Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985 Gutek, Searle and Klepa, 1991 Hughes and Galinsky, 1994 Klitzman, House, Israel, and Mero, 1990 MacEwen and Barling, 1991 O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth, 1992 Parasuraman, Greenhaus and Granrose, 1992 Voydanoff, 1988	MISCELLANEOUS <i>Absenteeism:</i> Goff, Mount, and Jamison, 1992 Dalton and Mesch, 1990 <i>Accidents:</i> Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991 <i>Alcohol use:</i> Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997 <i>Hypertension:</i> Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997 <i>Intent to leave:</i> Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996 <i>Loss of productivity:</i> Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991 <i>Presentism:</i> Hall and Parker, 1993 <i>Turnover:</i> Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996; Burke, 1988; Dalton and Mesch, 1990 <i>Wasted human potential:</i> Wagner and Neal 1994

Table 2.1: Negative effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflict

Differences in sub-groups: Research has tried to identify sub-groups that are affected more strongly by work-family conflict and family-work conflict:

- *Women versus men:* Research which has attempted to explain work-family conflict and family-work conflict on the basis of gender has found no significant differences. Frone and Yardley (1996) developed a set of differential hypotheses

concerning the moderating influence of gender on the two types of work-family conflict to health outcomes. However, in two cross-sectional data sets, they failed to find that gender moderated the relationship between work-family conflict and employee health. In another four-year longitudinal study of employed parents, researchers found that gender was not a viable moderating variable in work-family conflict and family-work conflict (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997).

- *Dual career families versus traditional families:* The increasing number of females in the workforce is also related to increase in dual career families. Research indicates that work-family conflict and family-work conflict is higher in dual-career families than traditional families. Judge et al. (1994) in their study of 1300 US executives found that male executives who were in dual-income families reported higher levels of job stress than male executives in traditional families. Although men in traditional households reported some conflict of work with family, they reported little conflict in the opposite direction. This finding is also supported by Brett, Stroh & Reilly (1992), Higgins and Duxbury (1992) and Schneer and Reitman (1993).

Differences between dual-career and traditional families may be explained on the basis that traditional families allow male breadwinners to spend more time at home with fewer household responsibilities. Thus, males in traditional families are likely to encounter lower conflict and job stress. In dual career families, the fact that both partners are working also affects the support a worker can draw from the spouse/significant other, affecting work-family and family-work conflict (Bedeian, Mossholder and Touliatos, 1987).

- *Number of dependants at home:* Parental demands and the felt need to spend time with one's family, may depend on the number of children one has, and on the youth of those children (Bedeian, Burke and Moffett, 1988). The greater the number of children one has and the age of the youngest child influence work-family conflict and family-work conflict (Judge et al., 1994; Brett, Stroh & Reilly, 1992; Frone and Yardley, 1996; Schneer and Reitman, 1993).

- *Hours worked per week:* Shorter working hours are expected to reduce work-family conflict, whereas the time devoted to dependant care positively influence family-work conflict (Judge et al., 1994; Bedeian et al. 1988; Gutek et al. 1991; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, and Hildreth, 1992).
- *Adults in Education:* Adam, King and King (1996) looked into work-family conflict with a sample of full-time workers enrolled in weekend or evening courses. They propose that such a sample is likely to encounter higher levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict than a typical adult sample, given the likelihood of additional time constraints imposed by school-related activities.

As the complete sample of Adam et al. (1996) consisted of only those workers who were in full-time employment and attended courses as well, it is not possible to directly compare work-family conflict results of adults in employment who are pursuing higher education with employment to those who are not. Additional studies looking into the affects of adult education on work-family conflict and family-work conflict could prove valuable, especially in the light of the growing significance of self-development, employability and adult education.

- *Occupational groups:* Owing to the nature of the samples chosen, there is limited evidence linking work-family conflict and family-work conflict to different occupational groups. For example, Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992) noted that job involvement was significantly related to work-family conflict among white collar workers but not blue collar workers. On similar lines, Judge et al. (1994) found that occupations requiring higher responsibilities and longer working hours are likely to result in higher work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

There is, however, a shortage of studies in this area. Studies with large and wide samples across various occupational groups that could associate various occupational groups to work-family conflict and family-work conflict could be useful predictors of this conflict. Such findings will be useful in developing rewards that are likely to incorporate an understanding of conflict on the work-family interface in reward design.

In addition to the above trends, a constant theme that appears from the research is how the personality of the individual worker, and the importance they give to family and work, affects the level of conflict, and the degree and direction of work-family conflict.

2.2 FAMILY-FRIENDLY ORGANISATIONS

Realising the possible impact of tension on the work-family interface, organisations are changing their reward strategies to include work-life issues. This section looks at transformation in organisations brought about by attention to work-family issues, changes that are under consideration, the rationale behind these policies, and the response of employees to them. Literature analysed in this section is a mixture of academic research and practitioner viewpoint.

2.2.1 Family Supportive Environment

Family supportive organisational environments can be divided into two major components - family supportive supervisors and family supportive policies. Both elements represent the organisation's efforts to support workers with family responsibilities (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). A supportive supervisor is one who empathises with the employee's desire to seek balance between work and family responsibilities. This support might include accommodating an employee's flexible schedule, being tolerant of short personal phone calls after school, granting a time trade so that new elder-care arrangements can be monitored, allowing one to bring a child to work on a snow day, or even offering a kind word when the babysitter quits. Family supportive policies refer to services that make the everyday management of family responsibility easier, such as childcare, elder care, flexitime, information and referral services, care for sick children, telecommuting, job sharing, parenting seminars and family leave.

Family supportive supervisors: The positive outcomes of supportive supervisors are evident from research (Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Bruce and Reed, 1994). Supervisors' behaviours that were seen as supportive of non-work demands of the respondents showed consistent positive effects on job satisfaction and better health

outcomes. This can be explained by perceived increase in control and reduction in work-family conflict (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). On the other hand, employees who perceived their supervisors as unsupportive on family issues reported higher levels of stress, greater absenteeism and lower job satisfaction (Rogers and Rogers, 1989).

Family friendly programmes: Many organisations in the UK and USA are introducing family friendly programmes to support harmonisation of work and family life. These programmes cover a variety of issues surrounding the work-family interface, and have different degrees of complexity in design. They vary significantly in financial implications, and require different levels of attitudinal change and commitment to a philosophy of family friendliness. They also need to be understood from the employer's and the employee's point of view.

- *Increase in use of family friendly policies:* The growing use of work/family and diversity initiatives is reported in William M. Mercer's (1996) survey of 800 employers, having a combined workforce of nearly 7 million. Their sample was predominantly in large US organisations (employing more than 1000 workers). Eighty-six percent of employers believed that they must address work/family and diversity initiatives to successfully compete in the 1990s marketplace. This is supported by findings from other large-scale surveys of employers on both sides of the Atlantic (Hewitt Associates 1996, 1998; Forth, Lissenburgh, Callender and Millward, 1997; Scott, 1996). These suggest that programmes and policies which help employees balance work and family responsibilities have grown substantially during the past five years and are expected to grow continuously.

The most common programmes reported are flexible work scheduling, child and eldercare programmes, and employee assistance programmes (William M. Mercer, 1996; Hewitt Associates, 1996).

- *Benefits of family-friendly policies:* William M. Mercer's (1996) respondents singled out such initiatives as flexible work scheduling, time-off programmes, and child-care benefits as aids to recruiting. Sixty four percent of the respondents believe that such programmes increase morale, 50 percent think that they cut

absenteeism, and 47 percent believe they help to increase productivity. This view is shared by respondents in a survey by Buck consultants (1996), where the most common reasons employers cited for implementing work/life programmes were to remain competitive, raise morale, and enhance recruiting efforts (Scott, 1996).

Researchers also report that family friendly policies have a positive impact on the employees. Employees who believe that their organisations understand their family duties are more satisfied with their work-family balance than those who do not believe this to be true (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Other researchers have found that employees report work-family policies significantly reduce work-family conflict and improve the balance between work and family life (Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Judge et al.1994).

Michaels (1995) found that employees value employers who offer assistance such as flexible time, leave programmes and dependant care programmes. His study confirms that family-friendly programmes also benefit the company because employees are more committed to performing their jobs well, are more loyal to their employers, and show more initiative on the job. Others researchers report that an employee's ability to balance work and personal responsibility is of great importance in making the decision to sign up for a job (Platt, 1997) and to stay with the company (McShulskis, 1997). This is reflected in the work of Rogers and Rogers (1989) that companies that employed rigid practices regarding family responsibilities experienced greater turnover and hence economic losses.

- *Favourite family friendly policies - flexi-time and dependant care:* Many surveys report that the policies which have greatest value to employees across the board are the ability to work flexible hours and dependant care policies (McShulskis, 1997; Bohl, 1996; Brady, 1997). Scheduling practices which afford high levels of perceived flexibility contribute to lower levels of work-family conflict (Shinn, Wong, Simko and Ortiz-Torres, 1989; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Judge et al, 1994). Flexitime increases productivity and morale, while reducing the amount of worker absenteeism, truancy, and use of overtime (Swart, 1985; Mellor, 1986, Dalton and Mesch, 1990; Guy, 1993) resulting in improved employees' mental and

physical health outcomes (Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Parental leave and help with eldercare can reduce multiple role strain (Shellenbarger, 1991).

These policies are of particular use to working mothers and dual-earner couples. Flexitime helps women co-ordinate family and job responsibilities (Ralston, 1990), and increase parents' satisfaction with work-life balance (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Satisfaction with childcare arrangements significantly affects the happiness of both mothers and fathers with their work/family balance (Ezra and Deckman, 1996). Help with child-care can, among other things, increase productivity and employee morale, as well as reduce accident rates, absenteeism and turnover (Thomas and Thomas, 1990).

- *Money versus balanced lifestyle:* The dilemma of money versus time is complex. On the one hand, there is evidence that today's workforce increasingly demand jobs that do not interfere with their personal or family life. They look for a particular work environment and a balanced lifestyle rather than salary alone (Platt, 1997). Many say they are willing to make substantial trade-offs to receive family friendly services (Michaels, 1995). On the other hand, very few are ready to trade off a proportion of their present pay for more free time. However, ideas like getting one week's vacation as a bonus instead of a week's salary, and having the choice to take their overtime pay as either cash or paid time off, appeal to the majority (Dowd, 1997).
- *Family-friendly policies are for all employees:* At present most family-friendly initiatives are targeted at women and particularly mothers of young children (Brannen, Meszaros, Moss and Poland, 1994; Lambert, 1993; Seyler, Monroe and Garand, 1995). This overlooks the diversity in family needs that need to be taken into account. IBM, CIGNA and DuPont report that a growing number of men are using family friendly benefits, though women still use them more (Collingwood, 1996). The low take-up of benefits by men can be attributed, of course, to the fact that the family remains the primary responsibility of women (Hochschild, 1989), and because many workplace cultures define 'the family' as a concern of women workers (Haas and Hwang, 1995). Family friendly policies need to be expanded to

accommodate the needs of all workers to avoid a so called 'singles backlash' (Starcke, 1997).

- *Family-friendly policies for all organisations:* Many researchers have highlighted the point that family friendly policies are applicable only for larger organisations (Brannen et al. 1994, Bruce and Reeds, 1994; Seyler, Monroe and Garand, 1995). It can be argued that it is much easier for larger organisations, particularly organisations with larger work-sites (more than 1000 employees), to offer more and complex choices (Bohl, 1996). However, the most expensive or the most complex choices need not be the best possible option. Thomas and Ganster (1995) found that the family supportive practices that had most significant effects – supervisor support and flexible scheduling – were those that might be the most feasible for all organisations to implement. Relative to establishing day-care facilities, for example, supervisory development programmes that teach supervisors to recognise and to appreciate work-family role conflicts are inexpensive.
- *Employee participation is essential:* A recurrent theme throughout this literature is the importance of employee control. This control may be the key mechanism by which family supportive policies affect work-family conflict and strain (Thomas and Ganster; 1995). Family supportive interventions increase employees' perceptions of control, and this plays a central mediating role in an individual's ability to cope with competing demands. However, many such policies are more related to the HR manager's perceptions of relative contribution to the quality of working life, than to employee demand or the perceived utility of these policies (Ng and Chiu, 1997). It is important that those who are likely to be the recipients of such policies have more say in implementing them.

2.2.2 Non-traditional benefits

A large variety of benefits have been introduced under the family-friendly umbrella. Table 2.2 presents a comprehensive list of such benefits divided into eight categories.

TIME-OFF	PERSONAL GROWTH	
Career breaks Honey-moon leave Leave-without-pay-but-position-assured policy Maternity and Paternity leave Parental leave Sabbaticals Time-off banks Vacation planning	Community service (on company time) Educational Assistance (e.g. second language classes) Free magazine subscriptions Matching gifts to charities Sabbaticals	
TIME-RELATED POLICIES	PERSONAL FINANCE BENEFITS	
Compressed work schedules Flexible career paths Flexible work hours/scheduling Job-sharing Part-time working Telecommuting Term-time working Voluntary reduced time Work at home (All the 'time-off' policies)	College tuition assistance Discounts for personal travel Educational and support programmes Estate planning Finance and retirement planning Home Purchase Information and referral programmes Legal services Pre-retirement planning Tuition support for children's college education	
FAMILY-RELATED POLICIES	HEALTH AND RECREATIONAL BENEFITS	
Adoption benefits Before and after school childcare programmes Bring dogs to work Child-care referral Compassionate supervisors Elder-care referral Extending family coverage of to heterosexual partners Family sick days Information and referral programmes Maternity and paternity leave On-site lactation facilities for new parents On-site/near site childcare On-site/near site elder care Parental leave Partial funding of childcare Reduced work schedules for new parents Sick child programmes (caregiver on call) Time-off for children school activities	Alternative medicine coverage Athletic teams Birthday breakfasts Casual dress days Discounts for social events EAPs extended to family members as well Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) Employee discounts for health centres Fitness/nutritional counselling On-site fitness centre On-site mammograms and annual physical exams On-site massage therapy Stress management Wellness programmes	
WORK-SITE FACILITIES/ TIME MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE	EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES (Berridge, 1990)	
Cafeteria on premises Car washing Direct pay-check deposit Errand running (concierge) service Espresso carts Flower service Handyman Laundry service/ dry cleaning drop-off Oil-change service for employee autos (service comes to the work-site) On-site ATM or cash-checking On-site barber/hairdresser On-site dry cleaning On-site gift store On-site medical care On-site postal service Pharmaceutical delivery Public transport tickets (bus) offered for sale on site Shoe repair service Travel service Video rental	Aids Alcohol abuse Bereavement Career development Chronic illness Demotion Disability Discipline Dismissal Divorce Family problems Financial advice Gambling Goal setting Grievances Indebtedness Induction Job training Lay-off Legal matters Literacy and education Marital problems	Mental health Performance evaluation Physical fitness Promotion Racial harassment Redundancy Relocation Retirement Sexual harassment Smoking Stress (work-related) Stress (work-extrinsic) Substance abuse Suicide Verbal abuse Violence Vocational guidance Weight control Women's career breaks

Table 2.2: List of non-traditional benefits

These benefits vary in their complexity of design, their financial implications, and the level of attitudinal change and commitment they require.

Overall, then, this section provides support to the argument that it is possible for companies to pursue a double agenda in the workplace - one that considers both the employer's and the employee's needs - which not only eases employees' lives but also leads to enhanced productivity and other tangible business benefits. Many of the outdated assumptions that create difficulty in integrating work and family life also lead to unproductive work practices, undermining a company's ability to achieve key business goals. Restructuring the way work is done to integrate family life and work can lead to positive win-win results.

2.3 EMPLOYEES OF THE FUTURE AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS

The business community has witnessed substantial transformation over the past 10-15 years with consequences for the workforce. The 'old deal' has been broken and there has been inadequate attention to involve employees in defining the 'new deal' (Hendry and Jenkins, 1997). Some argue that the unidirectionally imposed new deal, and the psychological contract it supports, cannot last (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995). At the same time, a new type of individual is emerging, with the definitions of self, family, and expectations from work being rethought (Collins, 1996). A sexually and racially diverse workforce is bringing its own new set of expectations to the workplace (Rousseau, 1995). Combining the two affects - the consequences of restructuring on the employees, and the increasing diversity of the workforce - employees of the future are different from the employees of the past. However, the power of individuals in negotiating the written and unwritten contract largely depends on the knowledge and skill they hold and the demands of this knowledge and skills by the organisation. To explore these issues, this section is divided into three parts:

- The employee perspective on flexibility
- Diversity of the workforce
- Occupational profile

2.3.1 The employee perspective on flexibility

The UK workforce is largely composed of full-time employees. However both businesses and individuals are increasingly using alternatives to full-time permanent employment. Figure 2.1 shows changes in the employment patterns of men and women over the last decade. There has been a decrease in male full-time employment and an increase in female full-time employment. Part-time work and self-employment has increased for both men and women.

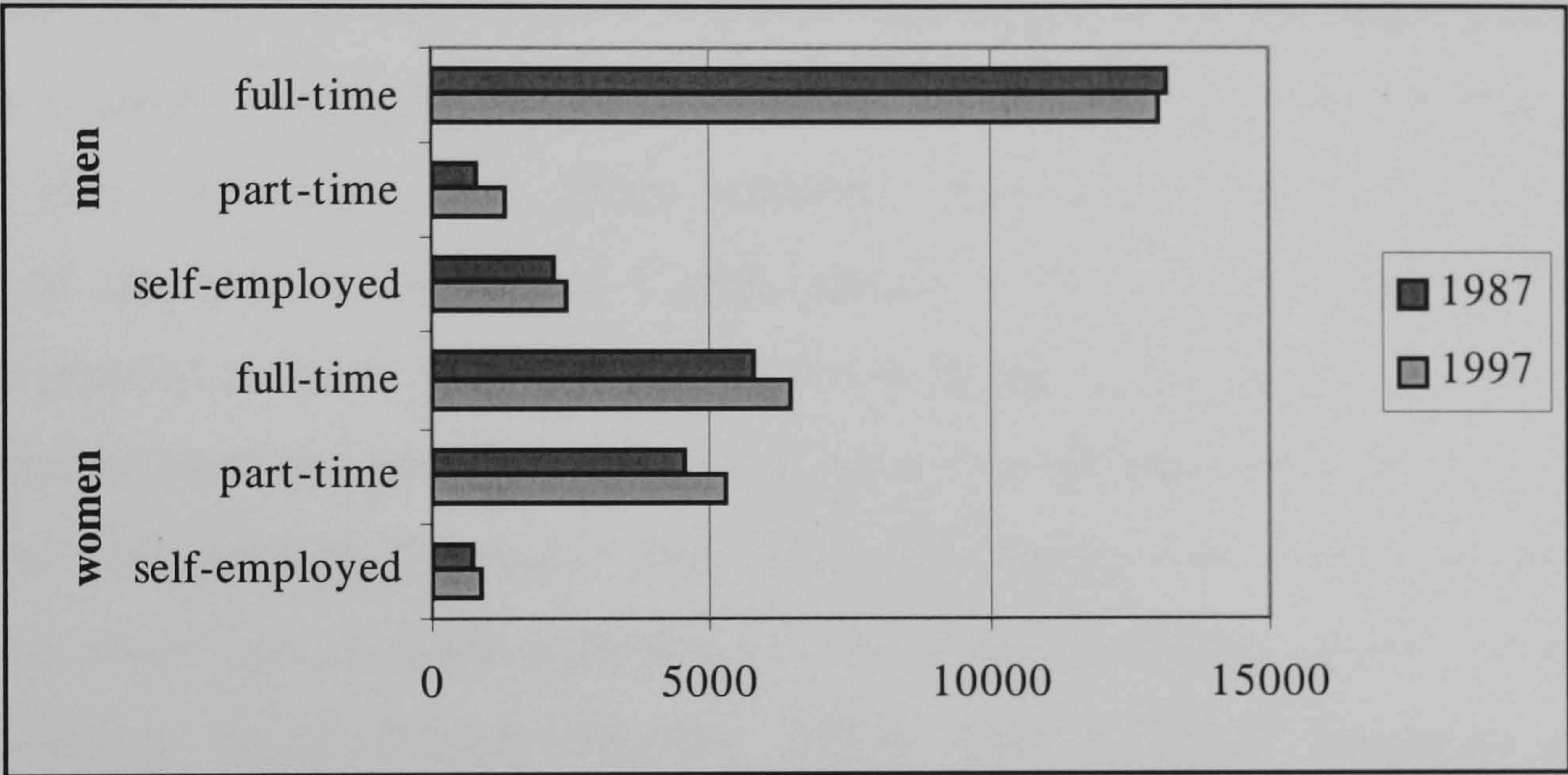


Figure 2.1: Changes in employment of men and women over the last decade (All figures in thousands); Source: Labour Force Survey historic supplement (1997)

In parallel with the above, the expectation that employees should work a fixed number of hours each week in a nine-to-five routine is changing, and there is increasing use of flexible working patterns. In broad terms, the rapid growth in flexibility can be attributed to two main factors: economic push and labour market pull. This section aims to develop an understanding of the role of employee pull. It will seek answers to questions such as, ‘why do employees take up different types of employment?’, and whether employees or employers have more control over these changes. The main sources of information relating to these questions are large-scale surveys in the UK.

Job-tenure and turnover: If one takes employee tenure as a measure of labour market flexibility, the picture varies considerably according to the economic cycle. It falls

slightly during recession, and increases during recovery. The true picture of employee tenure can be seen in the work of Gregg and Wadsworth (1995). They reveal a diverse labour market, with many jobs turning over quickly, but stability for others. For instance, nearly a third of all full-time workers in the UK have been in their job for ten years or more, and half have been with the same employer for five years or more. Clearly there does remain a privileged (and not insubstantial) group with considerable security of tenure (British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997). Job turnover seems to have changed very little over the last ten years: average job tenure has fallen slightly for men, and increased slightly for women (Social Trends, 1997).

As job tenure and turnover are linked to the economic cycle, so are the expectations of people. In a boom, people expect an increase in the number of jobs, whereas in a recession, they expect job cuts. Thus voluntary mobility increases in economic recovery. At the time of the Social Trends survey (1997), about a quarter of the workforce planned to leave their present employer in the following year. More than half expected to move to a new job, a trend that can be traced back to the same phase of the previous economic cycle between 1983-1989. The expectation of finding another job within a short time, if made redundant, is also naturally higher during economic recovery (British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997). This gives the employee more leverage in negotiating the terms and conditions of employment.

Flexibility in contract: Two indicators of labour market flexibility are part-time work and self-employment. On both these measures, flexibility has increased since the mid-1980s. Thus, while 16 percent of employees worked part-time in 1985, 20 percent did so later in 1995. Over the same period, the proportion of those in work who were self-employed increased from 12 percent to 17 percent. These figures partly reflect the changing composition of the workforce, particularly the increasing participation of married women in the labour market. However, even if the respondents are arranged into sex and age groups, the same trends are observed (British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997).

Table 2.3, based on the Labour Force Survey, gives the breakdown in types of employment for men and women in their main jobs, in terms of:

- Number of men/women in full-time permanent jobs
- Number of men/women in full-time temporary jobs
- Number of men/women in part-time permanent jobs
- Number of men/women in part-time temporary jobs

It also gives information on whether these employees are working in full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary positions by choice or not.

	Full-time	Part-time			Thousands
		Could not find ft job	Others ^a	total	Base: all employees ^b
MEN					
Permanent	10,178	172	557	728	10,906
Temporary					
Could not find permanent job	273	51	19	71	334
Others	263	10	156	165	428
Total	537	61	175	236	773
Base: all employees ^c	10,801	235	748	982	11,784
WOMEN					
Permanent	5,544	375	3,781	4,156	9,699
Temporary					
Could not find permanent job	166	63	74	137	304
Others	194	17	385	402	596
Total	360	80	459	536	900
Base: all employees	5,935	457	4,271	4,728	10,663

Table 2.3: Employees by type of main job and reasons for taking it (all figures in thousands); Source: Labour Force Survey, Great Britain (spring 1997)

The main points to note are that in Great Britain, in spring 1997, while around nine out of ten male employees were working in full-time permanent positions, only about 50 percent of women were in permanent full-time jobs. Six percent of men worked part-time, with only just over one percent working part-time because they could not find a full-time job. The corresponding figures for women are 39 percent and 3.5 percent. Thus a significant majority of men and women working part-time are doing so by choice. This is less likely to be the case for temporary employees. Approximately eight percent of men and women work in temporary positions, and only one in three of these choose to work as a temporary employee because they do not want a permanent job.

^a others include working part-time by choice or working a temporary job by choice
^b Includes those who did not state whether they were full-time or part-time
^c Includes who did not state whether they were permanent or temporary

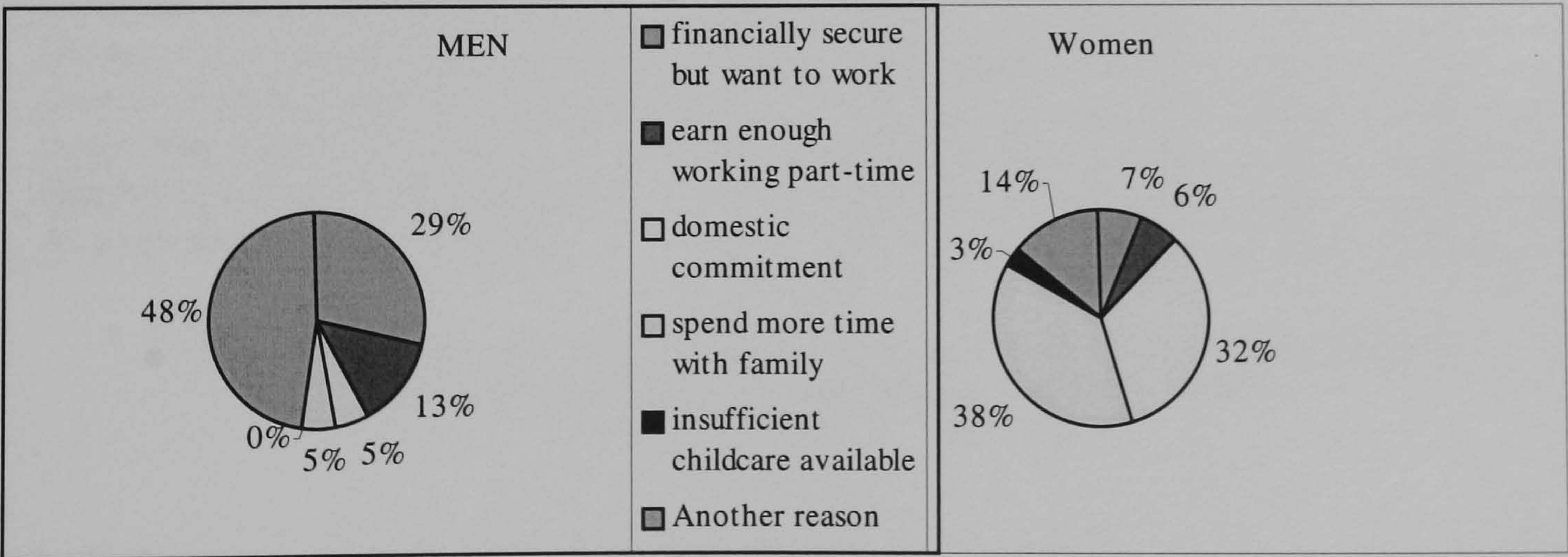
The reasons given by employees for taking up part-time and temporary jobs are elaborated in Table 2.4 and Table 2.5.

Part-time work: Table 2.4 gives the reasons why part-time employees and the part-time self-employed are working part-time. Seventy-one percent of people working in part-time employment did not want a full-time job, 15 percent were students or still at school, and 12 percent could not find a full-time job (LFS help-line, Oct 1997). 5.1m women work part-time as opposed to 1.2m men (differences in figures from Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 are due to the addition of part-time self-employed in Table 2.4). Of these, 8 in 10 women do so by choice, compared with 4 in 10 men. Thus, part-time working remains a preferred choice of many women.

	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Did not want a full-time job	71	38	79
Could not find a full-time job	12	24	10
Students or at school	15	35	10
Ill or disabled	1	3	1
Number in part-time work (,000s)	6,386	1,229	5,156

Table 2.4: Reasons for taking part-time work among part-time employees and self-employed
(Source: Labour Force Survey, Great Britain, spring 1997)

Further reasons for wanting to work part-time are shown in Figure 2.2 (LFS help-line, August 1997).



Base: Number of women in part-time employment who did not want a full-time job=4.07m
Base: Number of men in part-time employment who did not want a full-time job=466,000

Figure 2.2: People in part-time employment, by reason for not wanting a full-time job
(Source: Labour Force Survey, Great Britain, Autumn 1996)

The two main reasons for men wanting to work part-time were that they were financially secure but wanted to work, or that they could earn enough working part-time. For women the main reasons were based around family - restrictions from domestic commitments, and the desire to spend more time with family.

Temporary employment: Despite the growth in temporary employment, temporary jobs are still a small fraction of employment (7.1 percent of all employees), and as such, it is not a sign that job tenure is falling. While the use of part-time work is strongly by choice, this is a less likely to be the case for temporary employment. Overall temporary employment in Britain is on the increase and is spreading beyond industries and occupations that have traditionally used this form of employment (e.g. hotels and repairs, professional occupations like teaching) (Sly and Stillwell, 1997).

Table 2.5 shows that 39 percent of people in temporary employment want a permanent job. While there are slightly more women than men in temporary employment, they are similarly distributed across age groups and various forms of temporary work. Men are more likely than women to be in temporary work because they cannot find a permanent job. This is no doubt because the flexibility of temporary work helps women combine work with other responsibilities, such as looking after children during school holidays (Sly and Stillwell, 1997; Fanning & Maniscalco, 1993).

	All (%)	Men (%)	Women(%)
Could not find permanent job	39	45	34
Did not want permanent job	30	24	35
Contract included training	6	7	5
Some other reason	26	25	27
Number in temporary jobs (,000s)	1,673	773	900
As a percentage of all employees	7.5	6.7	8.5

Table 2.5: Temporary employees by reason for taking a temporary job
(Labour Force Survey, Great Britain, spring 1997)

Overall the proportion (within their age groups) of employees who were temporary was highest among those aged 16-24 and those over retirement age (Sly and Stillwell, 1997). For the younger employees in this category, temporary jobs can offer an opportunity to acquire skills and experience in addition to income. In some cases, this includes training which is likely to help them find a permanent job within the firm or

elsewhere. It also helps combine work with travel or higher education, and is a lifestyle option for some. For retirees and early retirees, it is a way to earn extra income and manage other interests on the side (Fanning & Maniscalco, 1993).

Looking at the increase and decrease in temporary work in occupational groups, the small increase in the overall percentage of temporary workers was outstripped in the professional occupations. In 1992 around one in 10 professional employees was temporary - this proportion has reached one in seven by 1996 (Sly and Stillwell, 1997). For highly skilled workers, temporary contracts can provide a higher income and greater autonomy.

Flexible working patterns: An increasing number of employees are using flexible working patterns. Table 2.6 shows that among full-time employees, around a sixth of men and a quarter of women worked some form of flexible working patterns in spring 1996. Flexible working patterns are used more by women than by men. The most common form is flexible working hours, which was worked by 9 percent of males and 13 percent of females. Overall the second most frequently used form was annualised hours, where a set number of hours are worked over the course of a year. However, among women, term-time working was even more popular, presumably because it allows them to combine work and child care responsibilities once children have started school (Social Trends, 1997).

The Labour Force Survey (Table 2.6) does not give us any information on how much of this flexibility is the result of choices by the employer or employee. Some forms of flexibility, like job-sharing and term-time working, are usually requested by the employee. Annualised-hours, on the other hand, remains one of the most controversial forms of flexible working. Often the decision to use this form of flexibility is to provide financial benefits for the organisation, and not because employees want a better work-life balance. For employees, the effect of using annualised hours vary from very favourable to complete failure (for examples see Gall, 1996).

LFS help-line (December 1997) gives a breakdown of employees working flexitime in spring 1997, by occupation. For both men and women, a high proportion of employees in clerical and secretarial occupations worked flexitime. The rate was also high in

associated professional and technical occupations, among women managers and administrators, and professional men.

	Males (%)	Females (%)	All employee(%)
FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES			
Flexible working hours	8.6	13.2	10.2
Annualised working hours	3.7	4.2	3.9
Four and a half days week	2.7	2.4	2.6
Term time working	1.0	4.7	2.3
Nine days fortnight	0.5	0.2	0.4
Any flexible working pattern	16.6	24.7	19.4
PART-TIME EMPLOYEES			
Flexible working hours	5.9	7.4	7.1
Annualised working hours	2.6	3.2	3.1
Term-time working	4.6	9.7	8.9
Job-sharing	-	2.4	2.2
Any flexible working pattern	14.5	22.9	21.5

Table 2.6: Employees with flexible working patterns: by gender, Spring 1996
 (Source: Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics;
 Table 4.15, Social Trends, 1997)

There is an increasing skill shortage among professional, associated professional and technical people and the number of hard-to-fill vacancies in this area are on the increase (Walsh, 1997). Combining it with the rapid increase in temporary workers in professional occupations (Sly and Stillwell, 1997), it seems that employers are trying to retain these 'knowledge' workers by providing flexibility. This also holds true for female managers and administrators, where companies are trying to obtain competitive advantage through diversity (Thomas & Ely, 1996; Liff, Worrall and Cooper, 1997; Thomas, 1990) by retaining females managers who want harmonisation of work and family life.

Downshifting: While official data is available on part-time and temporary workers wanting to work full-time, there is little information available on those who are in full-time employment and want to, or are shifting towards, part-time and temporary employment. The Labour Force Survey introduced a set of questions in 1995 intending to measure over-employment in the labour market. However, the responses to these questions were perceived as particularly subjective, and by their very nature did not test satisfactorily. Hence the results to these questions were not included in the LFS results and no question(s) on over-employment have been included in LFS since then (Laux, 1997).

There is evidence of growing workload and stress in the labour market. A NOP poll commissioned by the TUC (1995) points out that over 70 percent of British workers working over 40 hours want to work less, and although 53 percent of the women and 14 percent of the men would prefer to work part-time, only 40 percent and three percent are respectively doing so. A large number of studies report that changing work patterns have resulted in an increase in workload, responsibilities and stress (Coe, 1993; Benbow, 1993), leading to a decline in motivation and job satisfaction (Gallie and White, 1993; Hayes and Hudson, 1995).

The negative consequences of changes on the work-front are compounded by changes in the demographic composition of the workforce. Together, the two trends have resulted in the formation of a group of employees labelled 'Downshifters'. Downshifters are the antithesis of the acquisitive yuppies of the eighties. They believe that time is more important than money and that it is better to work less, and be happy and fulfilled, than be well paid for struggling with jobs that are stressful or unrewarding. To *downshift* means to cut out unnecessary expenditure and cultivate a simpler lifestyle with time to do more of the things one wants to do, but not go to the extremes of dropping out of society or attempting self-sufficiency. Though it was heralded as "a new Renaissance philosophy" by the Trends Research Institute in New York, which is credited with inventing the term in 1994, the idea is far from new. It echoes, for example, the Gandhian "voluntary simplicity" of the 1930s (Quinion, 1997), and it existed in the 1980s on a smaller scale (Harvey, 1997).

Schor (1991, 1995, 1996) points out that an increasing number of people want more balance, less stress, and more time in their lives, as well as more meaningful work and the opportunity to spend time with their children. Productivity has increased but has been passed on as income rather than work-time reduction. The workforce thus is caught in 'work and spend' cycles, leaving little time for other pleasures in life.

Underlying increased working hours, increased stress and lack of control by employees is a culture in which individuals are measured by what they have and can buy. Therefore, individuals are themselves partially responsible for the decreased balance between work and other activities in personal life (Schor, 1991). In contrast, people

who have redefined their values and broken away from the work-spend cycle have been able to maintain a comfortable life because a substantial proportion of their income was spent coping with the emotional and social consequences of over achievement and maintaining a consumerist lifestyle (Quinion, 1997; Schor 1991; Saltzman, 1991).

Various writers on downshifting (Schor, 1996; Laabs, 1996; Ehrenreich, 1995) cite surveys in the USA which report that a significant number (from 20-50 percent) of Americans have cut back their hours at work, declined or did not seek a promotion, lowered their expectations for what they need out of life, reduced their commitments, or moved to a community with a less hectic way of life.

There are no defining characteristics of the downshifter. Downshifters are disproportionately women, although there is only an 11 point gap between the sexes. They are not just people with children, although many have children. They belong to all age groups up to 55, including very young people who are opting out of the consumer society at the beginning of their lives, avoiding what they see as the traps of their older siblings, relatives, co-workers or even parents. However, they tend to be more educated than the general population, and have higher incomes: those at the bottom of the income scale cannot afford to downshift (Schor, 1996). Ironically, the requirement for remodelling one's life is financial independence and has therefore been taken up principally by middle-class professionals (Quinion, 1997; Saltzman, 1991).

There has been no research on downshifting in the UK. At first sight, the terms looks like another fashionable fad of business terminology, but this point of view starts to change on closer analysis. Let us first expand on what is downshifting. Saltzman (1991) divides downshifters into five categories; the plateauer, the back tracker, the career shifter, the self-employed, and the urban escapee.

- *Plateauers* develop the ability to grow and learn in whatever job they are doing - without requiring the external rewards of promotion to define their achievement. They are typically independent and self-aware, and do not want the added responsibility and increased time commitment that comes with formal promotions. For many plateauers, reinventing success means redefining long-held ideas about what constitutes a dull and uninspiring life versus an "exciting" one.

- *Back trackers* step back from a glamorous (and exhausting) job because they feel that the career has taken control of life, and family and children are being neglected. For others the turning point can be a realisation that job stress is having a serious impact on their physical and mental well being. Some look for a deeper and more comprehensive meaning in life and turn to voluntary work
- *Career shifters*, unlike career changers, still gain satisfaction and enjoyment from their chosen professions but change their approach. The approach they take is more appropriately labelled 'career shifting' because it involves a refocusing rather than a complete redoing of their professional pursuits. Some career shifters move towards non-profit organisations, social work, or part-time work, which can all be a temporary arrangement or a permanent turn in the career.
- *Self employed* downshifter is different than the business entrepreneur who works gruelling hours and risks all for the power and glory of controlling his own fate - and whose superhuman efforts often leaves him burnt out or bankrupt. Men and women who choose to downshift through self-employment take this shift as a lifestyle decision and see it as an ideal way to keep growing both personally and professionally.
- *Urban escapees* are motivated in large part by the need to re-establish closer ties to community and family. They are typically professionals who have moved away from home to pursue careers, especially those who are single and do not have children of their own. These professionals have increasingly turned to their communities of work to give them the sense of family and security. If this support is insufficient, or ruptured by downsizing and restructuring, people end up feeling isolated and alienated, and become 'escapees'.

Looking at the UK workforce with an expanded definition of downshifting, one finds evidence of it in the UK. Self-employment is on the increase and many people are taking it as a lifestyle option. Women after childbirth and those with young children are demanding shorter and flexible working time arrangements. Professionals are demanding autonomy and shifting to temporary work by choice. Managers are getting more concerned about leading a balanced life (Benbow, 1993; Coe, 1993), and people do turn down promotions for fear of added responsibility (FWLS report in Social

Trends, 1997). Therefore, many changes in the working practices of the future can be observed and analysed under the umbrella of downshifting.

Downshifting can be viewed as the next level beyond work-life balancing and family friendly policies. It requires that companies be more creative in their concepts of what it means to integrate business needs with employee motivation, talent and pursuit of happiness. Organisations make concessions towards work-life balance by providing options such as telecommuting, job-sharing, part-timing, flexitime and sabbaticals. But downshifter demand even more innovative solutions to modern life's dilemmas, and there is evidence that companies are beginning to respond with even more creative ideas (Laabs, 1996; Costello, 1995; Ehrenreich, 1995).

2.3.2 Diversity of workforce

The trend towards increasing diversity: The demographic composition of the workforce is changing. A widely acknowledged change taking place is the increase in *the economic activity rates of women*. In spring 1996, 71 percent of women of working age in the UK were economically active compared with an economic activity rate of 85 percent for men. Compared with ten years ago (i.e. in 1986), this represents a three percent increase in the economic activity rates for women and a three percent decrease in the economic activity rates for men (Sly, Price and Risdon, 1997). The most significant increase during this time period has been *the economic activity rate for women with children aged under five*, rising from 40 percent to 54 percent between 1986 and 1996. Similar, though less significant, increases have been observed in the total number of *working mothers* (Sly, Price and Risdon, 1997). Between 1984 and 1994, mothers' employment rose at twice the rate of that for other women, from 49 percent to 59 percent, with most of the growth being in full-time employment, (17 percent to 24 percent) (DfEE, 1997).

Alongside working mothers is the much 'invisible and taken for granted' topic of *working fathers*. Brannen, Moss, Owen and Wale (1997) indicate that fathers are more likely to be employed than other men. They also work longer hours- on average four hours a week more. Between 1984 and 1994, there was little change in the employment rate for fathers. There was a slight increase in working hours and some increase in part-

time employment, though from a very low level. Most fathers - 85 percent or 5.1 million - were employed in 1994. Only six percent were economically inactive. As a result, in 1995, both adults were in work in 62 percent of *married couples of working age with children* (compared with 50 percent in 1985) (Newman, 1997). Overall, the increase in mothers' employment has not resulted in any compensating change in fathers' employment: there is no indication of a substantial shift to more part-time employment or of a reduction in working hours among those employed full-time. The consequence is an increasing workload on parents, as mothers' employment increases and fathers' high employment rates and long working hours remain constant (Brannen et al., 1997).

Another significant increase is in *lone parent families*. In 1995, lone parents headed 22 percent of all families with children, nearly three times the proportion in 1971 (Social Trends, 1997). Most lone parents were mothers, but just under 2 percent were lone fathers. Lone parenthood has a major effect on parents' employment - only just over half (54 percent) of lone fathers were employed, compared with 86 percent of fathers living with partners (Brannen et al., 1997)

For *the future*, DfEE and ONS (Harris, 1997) estimate that economic activity rates for men of working age are projected to fall slightly between 1995 and 2006 - by 2 percent points to 83 percent. Those for women are projected to rise by 3 percent points to 74 percent in the same period. The projected changes in economic activity rates vary for age and gender. For men aged 25-54 (fathers with dependant children), there is relative stability predicted between 1995-2006. In contrast, rates for 55-59 year old men are expected to continue to decrease - from 74 percent in 1995 to 69 percent in 2006. The largest increases are indicated for 25-35 year old women for whom economic activity rates are expected to rise by 10 percent points, to 81 percent in 2006. Rates for women aged 35-44 are expected to increase relatively little because women tend to have children at an older age than previously (after establishing careers) and to participate less in the labour force when they have dependant children.

Understanding the diverse workforce: In trying to understand the *gender diversity of the workforce*, many researches argue that the increase in the economic activity rates of women is not a recent phenomenon and has been going on for decades. Hakim (1993)

points out that the true 'rise' in women's economic activity rates could only apply to the period after 1971, when part-time work started to be a significant option for women. The changes in full-time employment for women become significant only after the mid-1980s (Hakim, 1993; DfEE, 1997). These genuine and significant changes in female participation in employment remain to be explained, and may be due to a sea-change in women's non-financial work commitments (Hakim, 1992). If not observed carefully, these changes will simply be over looked within the long-standing myth of rising female employment (Hakim, 1993).

The key to understanding the needs and values of the female workforce is understanding its heterogeneity. Hakim (1991) identifies two main groups - (1) family-centred women, for whom paid work is a subsidiary activity which does not take priority over domestic responsibilities (and is hence often part-time or short-lived); and (2) women who, like men, are committed to paid work and the associated status-attainment process, and have a greater propensity to continuous, full-time year-round employment.

However, the increase and heterogeneity of women in the workforce has also created a diverse male workforce, where single males, males in dual-income families, fathers in traditional families, and fathers in dual income families need to be put into separate categories. Tate (1997) looks at the household economic activity for each major type of household:

- single adult male
- single adult female
- male lone parent with dependant children
- female lone parent with dependant children
- married working age couples with children
- married working age couples without children
- married one pensioner couple without children

She argues that the economic activity of a person can be explained better depending on the type of household they belong to than by sex. For household type with one adult (viz. single person and lone parent households), there is more similarity between male

and female single persons who have comparable distribution of economic activity. Both are very different from the lone parent households, where economic inactivity is high. Looking at the households with couples of working age, the proportion of adults employed is high, comparable with proportions employed in single person households. This is true for households with dependant children nearly as much as for those without children, and the level is much higher than for lone parents of either sex.

The increasing number of women and lone parents in the workforce is thus likely to lead to more part-time and temporary work by choice, and increased demand for more flexibility. Lone parents and women may be joined by male members desiring more work-life balance, especially those from dual income families.

On the household account, the most significant element in planning for the future is *the dual-income family* (with or without children). Dual income families bring added responsibilities towards home and are reported to have the highest work-family conflict and family-work conflict (Judge et al, 1994). Women belonging to this group (especially those with children) are most likely to opt for part-time work, and some (in the UK) are demanding flexibility after having a child, as their legal right (Howlings, 1997). There has been no reported increase in male part-time work in this group, although flexible scheduling is regarded highly. However, the greater financial security that comes from the income of second partner can help men decrease working hours for work-family balance or for personal growth options like higher education and sabbaticals.

Harrop and Moss (1995) and Martin and Roberts (1984) consider the implications of dual-income families and parental employment. The main means of managing employment and family responsibilities with dependant children in most dual-earner families is for the mother to work short, part-time hours, and evenings and nights. Fathers' patterns of employment, by contrast, are usually incompatible with playing an equal part in managing the dual-earner lifestyle (Brannen and Moss, 1991).

Another noteworthy characteristic is that the proportion of couples (with and without children) who are both employed decreases with lower levels of qualification, and does so steeply at the lowest levels (Tate, 1997). This implies a high educational profile for

the dual career couple, making it more likely that organisations will try to accommodate the changing needs of these workers. Also, women are opting to have children at an older age after settling in their careers. This further increases the negotiating power of the educated, experienced female who is trying to balance work and family life. This fits with the increase in flexible scheduling for managerial, professional and associated professional women reported in Section 3.1.

Further trends: Other changes with implications for labour force strategies are an *ageing population profile* and increased higher education, resulting in late entry to the workforce (Social Trends, 1997). Harris (1997) projects that a combination of low fertility and people living longer will lead to a continuation in the trend towards an ageing population. The Government Actuary's Department (Social Trends, Table A.2) reports a predicted decrease in the ratio of child dependency and an increase in the elderly dependency ratio.

Organisations will need to take into account the increased responsibility for eldercare in the working population. At present, organisations are more accommodating to childcare needs than eldercare needs. In the future, dependant care policies are likely to require eldercare provision at least on the same level as childcare provision. At the same time, while childcare is mostly regarded as the prime responsibility of women, this is less likely to be the case for eldercare. This trend is likely to increase as co-habitation replaces marriages, and dual-income families replace traditional families. For organisations interested in adding competitive advantage through diversity, eldercare policies are to play a significant role, since different ethnic groups have different norms and values concerning eldercare.

The *higher education* participation of 16-19 year olds, already on the increase, is projected to rise from 59 percent in 1996 to 65 percent in 2006 (with the corresponding rate for 20-24 year olds increasing from 17 to 21 percent) (Ellison, Tinsley & Houston, 1997). Students take up part-time work and temporary work by choice (Table 2.4 and 2.5) - hence the projected increase in their numbers can be linked to an increase in demand for such work.

The overall picture, then is that employment rates among mothers will increase, and employment among fathers will remain high and constant. Employment among younger and older adults is falling due to increased further education and early retirements. The result is a redistribution of paid work over the life time, with an increasing concentration of employment among the 25-55 age group especially among men and women with children. This last group will also be responsible for dependant care, resulting in an increased co-incidence and concentration of paid and unpaid caring work, with the result that the total workload will be carried out by a relatively narrow age-group - a trend also highlighted by Harrop and Moss (1995).

2.3.3 An Occupational Profile

The skill levels required of an average employee are increasing, and occupational job growth is in the more skilled areas (Walsh, 1997). Such trends are likely to continue into the future, with Business Strategies Limited (1996)(funded by the DfEE) estimating large increases in the number of managers and administrators, professional and associated professional and technical occupations from 1996-2006 (Harris, 1997).

However, growth and changes in occupations, are better understood using quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Rajan, 1992). Quantitative changes are indicated by an increase or decrease in the numerical size of the occupation, whereas qualitative changes are indicated by an increase or decrease in their skills content. These two dimensions classify occupations into **four groups** (see Figure 2.3).

Group 1 is characterised by both qualitative and quantitative growth. Occupations in this sector have a high probability of increasing in number as well as skill content, and will be closely involved with the forces re-shaping work. Equally those in Group 4 have a high probability of decline because the same forces will render them irrelevant to the needs of the changing economy. Those in Group 2 may well decline in number but will have job security, good pay and career progression (as Group 1). This is because they will undergo skills enhancement consistent with the needs of the economy. Group 3 is similar to Group 2, but will be peripheral with lower skill levels and part-time work (Rajan, 1992).

Those in Group 1 will therefore be best placed to negotiate their terms and conditions of employment. However, if either of the conditions on the demand or the supply side change, negotiating power is likely to shift accordingly. Similarly the negotiating power of those in Group 4 is likely to remain minimal unless they re-train and move towards any other of the three Groups. Some workers in Group 2 will be able to negotiate working conditions on lines similar to Group 1. However, a decreasing number of workers in Group 2 and increasing number of workers in Group 3 indicates a flow from the former to the latter, especially in categories that overlap. It is likely that

Number Increasing	
Group 3 (peripheral) Secretarial occ. (p/t) Junior clericals (p/t) Recreational occ. (p/t) Personnel services occ. (p/t) Security occupations (p/t)	Group 1 Managers and administrators Engineers, scientists, etc. Associate professional Health and education professionals Multi-skilled crafts Sales and marketing occ. Security
De-skilling	Re-skilling
Group 4 Junior draftsman Single-skilled craftsmen Operatives Unskilled occupations Manual occupations	Group 2 (core) Multi-skilled clerks Supervisors Secretarial occupations Recreational services Secretaries Personal services
Number Decreasing	

Figure 2.3: Classification of Occupational Groups (Source: Rajan, 1992)

some of these migrants may be forced by their organisation to move towards Group 3, while others may choose it as lifestyle option. The voluntary shift from Group 2 to Group 3 depends on the demand for Group 2 workers (which is also linked to their negotiating power) and the working rights of Group 3 workers established in law. Thus more favourable conditions are likely to make more people shift.

2.4 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS AND REWARDS

2.4.1 Looking ahead to the long-term

Innovative reward practices can help organisations retain a diverse workforce (Scandura and Lankau, 1997) and achieve competitive advantage through diversity (Liff, Worrall and Cooper, 1997; Thomas, 1990; Thomas and Ely, 1996). These practices send out the message that the organisation is concerned about employee well-being (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994), and are now becoming a part of the new psychological contract offered to employees (Rousseau, 1995). The growing popularity of innovative reward practices is due to the fact that fewer jobs now require a 9-to-5 routine and productivity is measured in output, not time input. This brings innovative reward practices under the umbrella of factors that organisations can control, and raises employee expectations (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch, 1997).

Business needs, employee demands, and employee expectations are all linked to the business cycle (British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997). Even if we filter out the effects of the business cycle, some trends are likely to stay - for example, heterogeneity of the workforce and high skill level requirements for all jobs. Increased participation of women in the workforce has created an heterogeneous female workforce (Hakim, 1991) and an heterogeneous male workforce (Tate, 1997). Hence the dichotomy of work and family life based on the traditional male-breadwinner/female-homemaker has been replaced permanently. Similarly, another factor that is likely to leave a long-term effect on work practices is the increase in professions requiring high skill levels (Harris, 1997; Rajan, 1992). If skill deficiencies continue (Walsh, 1997), those who possess higher skills will continue to have their choice in type and terms of employment (LFS help-line, December, 1997; Sly and Stillwell, 1997). Recognising the increased skills and knowledge required, the younger generation is opting for higher education, which in turn increases the demand for part-time and temporary work (Sly and Stillwell, 1997; Fanning and Maniscalco, 1993). It may also increase the negotiating power of the new-higher-qualified-entrants to the labour market. However, such trends are not certain and the predictions cannot be entirely relied upon (e.g. introduction of college fees may deter students from higher education).

2.4.2 The costs and benefits of work-family policies

The cost-benefit analysis of policies on harmonisation of work and personal life should not be limited to individuals and organisations. Lewis and Cooper (1995) argue for adapting the RSA's (1994) stakeholder philosophy. A stakeholder approach can incorporate different perspectives on work and family, broadening the debate on social partnerships, and highlight the need for fundamental cultural change. Holterman (1995) notes that no research has yet attempted to study the full cost-benefit analysis of family-friendly policies taking account of benefits and costs for employers, employees, families, and the economy. A piece-meal approach can, however, provide some insight into the broader adverse effects for family, community and society.

The lack of balance in peoples' lives affects families. Family members need support for care of children and others, and time and energy at the end of the day to interact with the family. The negative effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflict spill over to other family members. There is growing evidence that work-family conflict affects parents' moods and parent-child interaction, which in turn affects children's behaviour (Barling 1986, 1994; MacEwen and Barling, 1991). Children's distress may be reflected in ill health, poor performance at school, and anti-social behaviour. Thus the cost of the well-being of future generations becomes a significant issue in work policies (Rifkins, 1995). Lewis and Cooper (1995) argue that unless people are empowered to contribute to work and family, there will be a severe crisis in caring. The elderly and vulnerable, as well as children, may be damaged unless employees are allowed to work in ways which do not preclude time for family, and are supported by an infrastructure of quality child and other forms of care.

Increased stress levels and a workaholic culture (British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997) are taking their toll on family, community and society. Thus the issue of better balance between work and family life is not an issue for individuals and organisations alone. Advocates of work/family policies are increasingly debating the role of government and other bodies in addressing these issues, rather than regarding it solely as a business issue (Lambert, 1993; Lewis and Cooper, 1995).

This broader social perspective is likely to have an impact on organisations. Thus, organisations of the future will not limit family friendly options to high hierarchical levels, professional and knowledge workers. Such workers will always have higher negotiating power, but single status employment, for example, may lead organisations to extend these services to all employees. Other reasons may include philanthropic responsibilities towards community and society, which may enhance the performance of the organisation. Socially responsible actions are being increasingly linked to corporate financial success, consumer purchase decisions, and the ability to attract and retain superior human resources (see Turban and Greening, 1996).

Supportive policies for the individual, family, community and society thus make the company an attractive employer and provide competitive advantage. With labour shortages in some fields and the projected shortages in the future, attracting top quality applicants is increasingly important for organisational success (Offerman and Gowing, 1990). Different organisational attributes influence an organisation's attractiveness as an employer. Firms in the USA with positive affirmative action programmes are more able to attract high-quality human resources than firms with discriminatory practices (Wright, Ferris, Hiller and Kroll, 1995), as are those that take a pro-environmental stance (Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996; Porter and van der Linde, 1995). Such programmes influence initial applicant-attraction to a firm (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Rynes, 1991). They also help retain quality employees (e.g. Judge and Bretz, 1992; Turban and Keon, 1993). However, Turban and Greening (1996) point out that a firm's 'Corporate Social Performance' will be important for applicants who have a choice. These are usually the top-applicants whom firms are attempting to attract, so socially concerned policies provide an advantage in the recruitment and retention of the most highly sought-after applicants.

Even shareholders are giving more significance to the philanthropic stance of companies. Wright et al. (1995), for example, found that financial markets reacted positively to firms with award-winning affirmative action programmes (in US), and negatively to firms with discriminatory practices. Studies like these point towards the converging interests of stakeholders for the harmonisation of work and personal life.

As the implications of the changing composition of the workforce become evident, traditional policies will be challenged and all stakeholders are likely to attach greater significance to the harmonisation of work and personal life. This is likely to manifest itself in a move away from the fragmented, piece-meal approach towards work-life issues, toward thinking about these in a strategic manner. Developments at this most critical juncture in our society, where work and family intersect, are likely to challenge traditional ways of working and produce significant cultural change in organisations.

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

The chapter brings to light the growing importance of incorporating work and personal life in designing working practices for the future. Keeping employees as the focus, it examines changes in the composition of the workforce, and points to their altering needs and expectations. These changes are in a direction which is likely to increase demand for flexible working, and more people are likely to give significance to a better balance between work and personal life. Thus, the impact of work-life is far more than redesigning reward packages – it is likely to redesign the way work is done.

This chapter also examined family friendly policies offered by organisations, and underlying organisational reasons for offering them. In the next chapter, with the focus on organisations, the direct business benefits of offering flexible working – the most popular, yet most complex family friendly policy – are presented. Looking into short- and long-term business cycles, the chapter attempts to understand changes in the recent past and predict possible scenarios in working practices for the future. As changes vary considerably between sectors, associations are established between specific sectors and flexible working options to trace these changes. The chapter concludes by presenting the research framework.

CHAPTER 3

FLEXIBILITY AND THE EMPLOYER

This chapter focuses on the use of flexibility in organisations, and supplements Chapter 2, which provided understanding of employee needs and attitudes. It is divided into five parts:

1. Past and present of work and working-time
2. Flexible organisations
3. The research framework
4. Negotiating power
5. Elaborating the research questions

It sets the scene for increased use of atypical working patterns over the last two decades by looking at the history of work, including how jobs and tasks were performed before industrialisation. In so doing, it establishes that jobs, as we know them, are not a part of nature.

In the second section, the review of flexibility begins by defining the meaning of the term, and summarising questions and controversies surrounding it. The use of flexibility on an organisational level is reviewed through surveys, with attention to sectoral differences. The purpose is two fold; to understand why organisations use flexibility, and to identify sectors for fieldwork. A variety of working options are discussed, establishing associations between sectors and modes of flexibility. While the work-life benefits of flexibility (along with the benefits of other family-friendly policies) have been discussed in Chapter 2, the reasons for use of flexibility by the employer are discussed to highlight its direct business benefits.

The third section presents the research framework, which is derived from the review of employee and employer perspectives. Power dynamics between the individual and the organisation are central in this framework, and the topic of negotiating power is therefore reviewed in the fourth section. This section provides a brief overview of power in general, and expands the concept of power in the work-life context. The final section elaborates the research questions.

3.1 PAST AND PRESENT OF WORK AND WORKING-TIME

Jobs are not a part of nature. They are historical products. The word 'job' is an old one, going back before the year 1400. But until 1800 it meant something different than what it does today. Before 1800 - and long afterwards in many cases - 'job' always referred to some particular task or undertaking, never to a role or a position in an organisation. Thus, in the pre-nineteenth-century world, people did not 'have' jobs in the fixed unitary sense; they 'did' jobs in the form of a constantly changing string of tasks. Their jobs were not provided by an organisation, but by the demands of their life situation, the requirements of an employer (the legal concept of 'employer' is also relatively new), and the things that needed to be done in that time and place. Then began industrialisation. During that earlier period, work was packaged into "jobs" to fit the demands of a new kind of workplace, and the numbers of those jobs grew along with the appearance of large factories and bureaucracies (Bridges, 1996).

The development of industrial capitalism brought about as its necessary concomitant the commodification of working time (Thompson, 1967; Giddens, 1979). As factory-based production came to supplant earlier systems of work organisation, working patterns, which had previously been socially organised by workers and regulated by nature, became increasingly subject to the discipline of the clock. Thompson's (1967) classic account of time and work under industrial capitalism demonstrates how the social significance of time has come increasingly to be shaped by the needs of capitalism. With the emergence of industrial capitalism, rhythms of work, which had previously been 'task-oriented' and dictated by nature, gradually became subject to a rigorous discipline imposed by employers. The creation of a clearly demarcated (although ill-defined in terms of its actual duration) 'working day' was a key development in the commodification of labour time (Giddens 1979), introducing a solid distinction between work and leisure. Although the pattern of the working week continued to be irregular (Thompson, 1967), with the coming of the textile mill and the engineering workshop, control over the duration and pace of workers' efforts came increasingly to lie in the hands of employers. Employers were able to create a system of discipline built around clock-time in which poor time-keeping could be punished by fines or exclusion from the factory (Pollard 1965).

When the change towards industrialisation started, people were deeply traumatised. The old way of life had had a stability and coherence that was very hard to give up. The new world of jobs was destroying the old interpersonal relations that defined social rights and obligations, and it was undermining the time honoured ways of interweaving home life and work life. (Bridges, 1996). Thus, this transition and the governance of working practices by clock-time was contested by workers, and control over time had to be wrested from workers by employers (Thompson, 1967; Reid, 1976). With the passage of time, governing work by clock-time became a common practice and a definite working-day became a standard associated with many jobs. Jobs not only became common, but also important; they became nothing less than the only widely available path to security and success.

At present, workplaces are shrinking and being automated, and work is once again being repackaged to meet new economic realities. This time the transformation represents “de-jobbing” of the developed world and a break away from strict commodification of time. The coming of industrialisation in the past parallels today’s transition into modern jobs and flexible working arrangements. Once again it is a turning point in the history of work, where the assumptions about living and working that people had grown comfortable with are being challenged (Bridges, 1996).

3.2 FLEXIBLE ORGANISATIONS

The UK labour market is becoming more flexible (Neathey and Hurstfield, 1996; Beatson, 1995; Hakim, 1990; Watson, 1994; CBI, 1994; IM, 1994; Cappelli, 1995). This section is an attempt to understand the use of flexibility in the UK; its past, present and future. The discussion starts by tracing the history of flexibility and then moves on to explore the main concepts and difficulties associated with understanding and analysing flexibility. Further on, an attempt is made to understand how and why organisations are using atypical employment practices by looking into sectoral differences and other characteristics associated with high and low users of various forms of flexible working options. This section is divided into two parts:

- Understanding ‘flexibility’

- Understanding the use of flexibility by employers

3.2.1 Understanding ‘flexibility’

The debate on flexibility in the UK has gained momentum since the model of the flexible firm was put forward by Atkinson and others in the mid-1980s (Atkinson 1984, 1985, 1987; Atkinson and Gregory, 1986; Atkinson and Meager, 1986, NEDO 1986). The model claimed that firms were increasingly seeking and achieving greater flexibility from their workforce, and that this flexibility divided the workforce into two sub-groups - ‘core’ and ‘periphery’. The model also suggested that the introduction of flexibility was part of the strategy of organisations with the intent to secure employment for core workers at the expense of the employment of peripheral workers. Since the Atkinson reports (Atkinson 1984, 1985, 1987; Atkinson and Gregory, 1986; Atkinson and Meager, 1986, NEDO 1986) were published, a large number of surveys and research papers have been written around the subject of flexibility. The debate on flexibility is surrounded by some questions and controversies, and to understand the use of flexibility in the UK it is essential to conceptualise the main ideas around flexible working.

The first issue is managerial policies: whether the growth in flexible working mainly reflects structural alterations and is a by-product of changes in the labour market, or is the result of purposeful managerial choice - an aspect of a strategic approach towards human resource management. There are ample studies to support the argument either way. However, according to Mayne, Tregaskis, and Brewster (1996), researchers using surveys (Marginson et al, 1988; Wood and Smith, 1989; Hakim, 1990; IRS, 1990; Hunter and MacInnes, 1992; McGregor and Sproull, 1992) have found that there is no strategy in the introduction and use of various forms of flexible working practices and that the introduction and expansion of flexible working has been merely ad hoc and reactive. On the other hand, those who have undertaken research at a case-study level (Geary, 1992; O’Reilly, 1992; Collinson, Knights and Collinson, 1990; O’Connell Davidson, 1993) have been inclined to be cautious about denying the absence of any kind of link between flexibility and strategy, and conclude that flexibility is a mixture of reactive and incremental (or emergent) strategic planning.

The second issue is the division of the labour force into two sectors due to an increase in the use of atypical employment, and the labels used for these sectors. The dominant analytical approach to understanding the growth in the relative importance of atypical employment has been to collapse these employment forms into a single category labelled 'peripheral', 'flexible' or 'secondary', and contrast it with full-time permanent employees in the 'core', 'traditional' or 'primary' category (Atkinson, 1984; Atkinson, 1985, Atkinson and Meager, 1986b; Hakim, 1987). The labelling of these options, core/periphery, primary/secondary, and flexible/traditional, is not ideal. For example, it can be strongly argued that the term 'peripheral' is misleading, carrying a pejorative connotation of inessential or unimportant, when it is common for such workers to undertake tasks which are very important to the successful operation of the organisation (McGregor and Sproull, 1991). A similar notion is attached to the labels 'primary' and 'secondary'. In a similar vein, part-time permanent employees are very much part of the 'traditional' British labour force and to include them in the non-traditional or flexible category is misleading (Hakim, 1987).

In fact, the idea of grouping all employment practices which are not 'permanent, full-time, nine-to-five' into a single category is not ideal. This division of the workforce into two groups, which goes as deep as the history of flexibility, and the labels used for the two categories, have created a feeling of inequality in the workforce. Even if those in the flexible workforce are not performing the most essential tasks, use of flexibility should not be viewed as dividing the workforce into those who are privileged and those who are at a disadvantage. It is the worker's preference for a particular mode of employment which is the key criterion that determines the case for either relative advantage or disadvantage. There is no simple dichotomy of relative advantages or disadvantages from a particular mode of employment (Nisbet, 1997).

Understanding flexibility is also problematic because it covers a wide range of options. Table 3.1 shows how the term flexibility is used for a variety of working options from full-time employees who experience temporal flexibility, to reduced hours employees and even external employees. These categories overlap, resulting in endless possibilities of working conditions e.g. part-time temporary, working a few days a week at home and a few days at the office, agency temps working compressed work weeks, etc. Further, each one of these options is an imprecise notion whose

interpretation varies between individuals’ perceptions, organisations, and countries. As Mayne, Tregaskis and Brewster (1996) point out, part-time work covers everything from a few hours to the conventional cut-off of 30 hours a week in the UK (Hunter et al., 1993), with further variation in the definition across Europe (Bruegel and Hegewisch, 1994; Konle-Seidl, Ullmann and Walwai, 1990). Similarly the distinction between temporary and permanent is not so clear-cut as it may first seem, with some permanent workers losing their jobs at very short notice (Hunter et al., 1993) and temporary contracts covering as long as two years, with some renewed for even longer periods of time.

Flexibility - full-time employees Annualised hours Compressed work schedules Flexible working year Flexi-hours or flexi-time Over-time Shift work	Flexibility - reduced-hours employees Job sharing Part-time working Phased retirement plans Term-time working Voluntary reduced working time (V-time) Weekend work
Flexibility - external workers Agency temps Outsourcing Self-employment Short-term contracts Subcontracting Temporary workers	Taking a break from employment Career breaks Leave-without-pay-but-position-assured Secondments Maternity leave Parental leave Sabbaticals
Flexibility - Place of work Home working	Teleworking

Table 3.1: Range of options covered by the term flexibility

The final step in understanding flexibility is the application of this term to describe the development of new organisational structures – the dawn of a new era of ‘post-industrialism’, ‘post-fordism’, or ‘post-modernism’. Flexibility is a common theme in this debate on the evolution of organisational forms (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Miles and Snow, 1986; Powell, 1990; Winch, 1994; Nadeem, Hendry, Bradley and Perkins, 1997).

3.2.2 Understanding the use of flexibility by employers

Despite being a vague and misleading label with multiple meanings, the decrease in permanent full-time work has fuelled the debate on flexibility during the last 15 years. In the beginning, the debate focussed on part-time working, self-employment,

temporary work, over-time and shift working. However, over the last few years, new forms of flexible working options, like flexi-time, compressed work weeks, and employment breaks have entered the arguments (see Table 3.1 for more details). This section looks into the use of flexible working practices by employers, as revealed in large-scale surveys. A large part of the data comes from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Workforce Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS), and the analyses of these surveys by researchers. Additional surveys and reports are used for other forms of flexibility that are not covered by these sources.

To understand the use of flexibility in the UK, the information from studies and reports is arranged into Table 3.2, Table 3.3 and Table 3.4. The first two tables show the use of flexible working options in different industrial sectors and is based on data from multiple sources (Casey, Metcalf and Millward, 1997; Dex and McCulloch, 1997; IRS, 1994; Naylor, 1994; Watson, 1994; Gall, 1996; Moralee, 1998; Sly and Stillwell, 1997). Table 3.4 presents some of the characteristics associated with various forms of flexible working practices. These are largely based on the analysis of Casey et al. (1997), Dex and McCulloch (1997), Gall (1996), Huws (1994), and Watson (1994). Simultaneous analysis of the information provided in these tables, in the forthcoming paragraphs, develops an understanding of the use of flexible working in various industrial sectors and different types of organisations.

Analysing flexible working practices by disaggregating them on the basis of industrial sectors helps create a clearer picture of the use of flexibility. Table 3.2 shows that:

- Manufacturing and other primary industries are high users of overtime, shift-working and annualised hours.
- Services, on the other hand, are high users of part-time working, self-employment, teleworking and flexi-time.
- Sectors which are simultaneous high users of different types of flexible working options are ‘hotels and restaurants’, ‘finance’, ‘business services’, ‘education’, ‘health and social work activities’, ‘other community, social and personal activities’.

Sector	Variable Hours ¹	Annual Hours	Shift-working	Flexi-time	Part-time	Temps/Short-term	Self-emp./Freelance	Telework
	Vary number of workers							
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	high					high		
Mining and quarrying	high		high		nil	high		
Food products, beverages and tobacco		high				high		
Manufacture of clothing and textiles,	low	high						
Leather and leather products	low							
Wood and wood products								
Paper, pulp, printing, publishing and recording media		high						
Oil refining and fuels		high	high					
Chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres		high	high					
Rubber and plastic products			high					
Non-metallic mineral products		high	high					
Metal and metal products						high		
Machinery and equipment								
Electrical and optical equipment								
Transport equipment					nil			
Coke, nuclear fuel and other manufacturing						high		
Supply of electricity, gas and water						high		
Construction						high	high	
Wholesales, retail trade and repairs (distribution)					high		high	
Hotels and restaurants					high	high	high	
Transport and storage	high		high					
Post and telecommunication	high		high					
Financial intermediation				high	medium		high	high
Real estate (business services)				high	medium		high	high
Renting, research computers and other business activities (business services)				high	medium			high
Public administration and defence, compulsory social security				high	medium ²		high ⁴	high ³
Education		high		high	medium	high		
Health and social work activities				high	high	high		
Other community, social and personal activities				high	medium	high		

Table 3.2: Use of flexible working options in different industrial sectors

¹ Largely covers overtime

² Excludes defence

³ In public services

⁴ In higher education

Detailed analysis of sectoral differences in the use of traditional forms of flexibility show strongest differences in the use of overtime and shift-working vs. part-time working. There is a negative association between part-time and over-time, and between part-time and shift-working. Manufacturing and other traditional blue-collar sectors employ workers largely on a full-time basis and gain flexibility in the utilisation of labour by varying the amount of work done by employees from week to week mainly through overtime and shift-working. These two forms of atypical working are found in production industries working at full-capacity in manual jobs, and are usually applied to men. Part-time working is found mostly in the services sector, in non-manual jobs, in organisations with higher labour cost ratios, and is mostly applied to women. Part-time work occurs mostly in the services sector, where business activity often occurs outside normal working hours or the working week, and requires extra part-time staff to cover additional weekday hours or weekend working. On the other hand, industries with very little part-time working (oil and gas, other mining, and transport equipment manufacture) are notable for their capital intensive production and continuous shift-based working (Casey et al., 1997).

Temporary employment and short-term contracts cover a wide variety of industries. However, all the industries which are high users of temporary contracts are characterised by work tasks of limited duration and/or uncertainty of demand that favour temporary employment. Sectors covered include 'agriculture', 'mining', 'food products, beverages and tobacco', 'supply of electricity, gas and water', 'education', 'other services', 'hotels and restaurants'. Some of these sectors like 'food products, beverages and tobacco' and 'education' are also high users of annualised hours. The link between use of temporary and annualised hours is seasonal or unpredictable demand of labour.

The occurrence of new forms of flexibility like flexi-time, teleworking, term-time working and job-sharing is higher in the services sectors than in manufacturing or other primary sectors (Table 3.2 and Table 3.3). The only exception to the above is compressed work weeks, which is used mostly in manufacturing industries. These new forms of flexibility can also be associated with non-manual and/or white collar workers (Table 3.4). Job-sharing and term-time working are mostly used by women and are

more in use in the public sector than in the private sector (Watson, 1994; New Ways to Work, 1993).

	Term-time working	Job-sharing	Compressed work week
Agriculture, forestry and fishing			
Energy and water supply			
Minerals, ores, metals, chemicals			
Metal goods, engineering, vehicles			high
Other manufacturing industries			high
Construction			
Distribution, hotels and catering, repairs	high	high	
Transport and communication			
Banking, financial and business services		high	
Other services	high	high	

Table 3.3: Use of new flexible working in different industrial sectors

Flexibility also takes the form of breaks from employment. The use of maternity and paternity leave, employment/career breaks and sabbaticals are all on the increase (IDS, 1997; New Ways to Work, 1993; Olmsted and Smith, 1994). While maternity and paternity leave are covered through legislation, employment/career breaks and sabbaticals are formally recognised in a small number of organisations and cover a very limited number of employees within organisations (New Ways to Work, 1993, 1997a, 1997b).

In addition to sector, other factors associated with the use of flexibility are the size and ownership of an organisation. Large organisations and large workplaces are associated with high use of flexible working (Casey et al., 1997), or more complex flexible working choices. The public sector is a higher user of flexible working options in comparison with the private sector (Casey et al., 1997). Although the bulk of the difference between the two is due to the very high use of part-timers in the public sector (McGregor and Sproull, 1991), the public sector also makes more use of other types of flexibility like flexi-time, teleworking, and job-sharing. In fact, the public sector has been responsible for the introduction of many new forms of flexibility in the UK (New Ways to Work, 1993). However, Hutchinson and Brewster (1994) note that for many public sector organisations, flexibility is a response to tough economic circumstances, while for the private sector, it is to attract and retain high quality staff

and to create a new culture. Hence, the use of flexibility in the public sector should be viewed with caution.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time: working is associated with the services industries, non-manual jobs, and females. It is used more in organisations with high labour cost ratio, and in sectors where the activity occurs outside normal working hours. • Over-time: is associated with the manufacturing industries, manual jobs, male employees, and the private sector. • Shift-working: is used mostly in large organisations, is practised more by men than women, is found more in personal and protective services, and is used by machine and plant operators • Temporary work: is equated with industries with tasks of limited duration and uncertainty of demand, and is used mostly in larger organisations • Sub-contracting: is used in larger organisations, mostly in public sector or in the non-trading sectors (education and construction) • Annualised hours: are associated with continuous process industries or in industries with seasonal or unpredictable demand. They show a link to professional occupations probably because of high use in education. • Freelancers: are associated with larger workplaces, with the sectors of higher education and public services, and are found mostly to be among professional and white collar workers • Homeworkers: are found more in manufacturing than services, mostly in manual jobs, and in the private sector • Teleworking: is mostly found in financial and business services and public services, and is used in data and word processing jobs • Flexi-time: is used by full-time rather than part-time workers, mostly white-collar, working in larger workplaces. It is also associated with the public sector rather than the private sector, and the use is highest in secretarial and non-manual jobs • Job-sharing: arrangements are found more in public than private sector, mostly used in clerical and secretarial occupations, particularly by women • Compressed week : is used more in manufacturing than services, specially in the crafts and related occupations, and increase in its use has been related to decrease in length of working week

Table 3.4: Characteristic associated with flexible working options

Reasons for use of flexible working: A question that arises in studying flexibility is ‘why are employers increasing their use of atypical working practices?’ Table 3.5 summarises the main reasons given by employers for using part-time workers, temporary workers and sub- contractors in the ELUS (McGregor and Sproull, 1991).

These reasons cover three main themes: (i) labour market pull for flexibility, (ii) matching manning levels to business demands, and (iii) to acquire the skills required by the business. Although there are differences in the pay package offered to the traditional and flexible workforce (mainly in the benefits package) (McGregor and

Sproull, 1991), employers do not, generally, give the cost advantages of part-time or temporary work as their reason for employing such workers (Beechey and Perkins, 1987; McGregor and Sproull, 1991).

<p>Part-time workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the need to meet peak periods in production or distribution• the inability to get full-time workers of desired quality• applicants wanting to work part-time• to retain valued staff who can no longer work full-time
<p>Temporary workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to provide short-term cover for absent staff• match labour use of fluctuations in demand• to cover work of limited duration (e.g. seasonal or one-off contracts)• to provide specialist skills
<p>Sub-contracting work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the demand for this work may not be sufficient to warrant having a permanent employee (specially in case of professional services)• matching manning levels to peaks in demand• worker preference to be self-employed

Table 3.5: Main reasons given by employers for using atypical workers

Reasons for increased use of flexible working practices have been compiled by many authors, giving purposes for which employers use flexible working and/or lists of advantages making a business case for the use of flexibility (Dex and Scheibl, 1999; McCampbell, 1996; Skyrme, 1994; Marcie, 1989; Wickham, 1997; Fanning, and Maniscalco, 1993; Gall, 1996; Olmsted and Smith, 1994; New Ways to Work, 1993; Huws, Korte, and Robinson, 1990; Casey et al., 1997; Nisbet, 1997; Huws, 1993, 1994; Hamblin, 1995). Olmsted and Smith (1994) present some of the common advantages (see Table 3.6). This table is by no means comprehensive. It neither covers all forms of flexible working options practised, nor does it cover all the advantages that each form of flexibility can bring to an organisation. However, it gives a flavour of business advantages that flexible working brings or can bring to organisations. Used properly, flexible working can help meet the employment and business needs of organisations by attracting and retaining quality employees, improving the motivation, commitment and performance of staff, as well as extending hours of service and/or use of equipment.

	FT	CWW	RPT	JS	VTP	FP	PR	L/S
Attract top-quality applicants	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Retain good employees	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Enhance cross-training				x	x		x	x
Build commitment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Reduce downtime on job	x		x	x	x	x		
Extend hours of service	x	x		x				
Increase use of equipment	x	x			x	x		
Improve allocation of labour	x		x	x				
Reduce stress, burnout	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Empower employees	x		x	x	x	x		
Reduce labour costs			x		x		x	
Reduce turnover/absenteeism	x		x	x	x	x		

Key: FT = flexitime
CWW = compressed work weeks
RPT = regular part-time
JS = job-sharing
VTP = V-time programmes
FP = flexplace
PR = phased retirement
L/S = leaves and sabbaticals

Table 3.6⁵: Matching employment and business needs to flexible work arrangements

Use of flexible working in the future: The use of flexibility is increasing (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3) and any upturn in the economy is predicted to lead to the creation of new jobs which will be disproportionately concentrated among atypical employment (Hutchinson and Brewster, 1994; Mayne et al.; 1996). Overall, services are higher users of flexibility than manufacturing or extraction, and one of the reasons for growth in the use of flexible working practices has been the growth of services industries. This growth of services is likely to continue in the future at the expense of manufacturing and primary industries (Business Strategies Limited, 1996), resulting in higher use of flexible working practices, specially those which are associated with services.

But the growth in the use of flexibility is also attributable to two other reasons. Firstly, there has been a greater preparedness of employers in many industries to organise labour inputs in a flexible manner. This has added to the increase in flexible working due to the growing importance of industries or occupations where such employment practices are typically found. For example, the total growth in part-time work outstripped the growth in the specific sectors known to be high users of part-time working (Naylor, 1994). Secondly, employers are also using innovative flexibility to meet the mutual needs of individuals and organisations. Annualised hours originated in continuous and semi-continuous process industries. They are now found in general

⁵ Table is slightly modified from that presented in the work of Olmsted and Smith (1994)

manufacturing and more recently in services (Gall, 1996; Watson, 1994; IDS, 1993). Term-time working has grown beyond the education sector into the public sector, and in retail, hotels and catering (Watson, 1994). In addition to the traditionally high self-employment sectors of agriculture and construction, many services sectors are now increasing their use of self-employed and freelance workers (Moralee, 1998).

Use of flexible working makes good business sense. The environment in which organisations operate, and the business issues arising from changes in work demands, support increased use of flexibility in the future. For example, an increase in environmental uncertainty may lead to an increase in the use of temporary workers and annualised hours; higher and specific skill requirements in each job may increase use of sub-contracting; environmentally friendly working options may lead to higher user of teleworking; and customer demand and competition may lead to longer opening hours and hence the use of flexitime, part-time, job-sharing and compressed working weeks.

A shift in types of flexible working options is also likely to take place as industrial sectors grow or decline, and as the demographic composition of the workforce changes. Over-time and shift-working, for example, are associated with manufacturing, manual jobs and male employees. These may be replaced by annualised hours, flexi-time, and part-time work, which are linked to services, non-manual jobs and women.

Use of new forms of flexible working may expand. Part-time working is the most rapidly increasing form of atypical employment (Naylor, 1994). Growth in the demand and use of part-time work indicates the possibility of increase in use of alternatives to part-time working i.e. job sharing and voluntary reduced time (v-time). It is possible to extend part-time work to more occupations and individuals by using these options. Job-sharing is one of the main ways to introduce part-time work into managerial and professional jobs (New Ways to Work, 1993b). V-time involves a smaller time-income trade-off than part-time work, and hence helps those individuals reduce their working-time who are not prepared to go down to the 30 hour part-time limit.

Individuals' request for flexible working and the ability of flexible working options to attract, retain and motivate employees is already cited as one of the main reasons given

by employers for such working practices. Thus, increased demand for flexible working practices by people in the future, as discussed in Chapter 2, is likely to make it a more useful tool for organisations to find the best suited individuals for jobs, especially as human capital becomes more vital to the survival of businesses.

Other factors which may affect the use of flexibility are the easing or tightening of constraints on managerial decision-making through unemployment levels, the legislative framework within which establishments operate, and the relative power of trade unions.

Flexible working and rewards: A significant increase in the use of flexible working necessitates changes in HR practices. If flexibility is likely to bring a major change in working time, then organisations need to think of policies for its manageability and how other organisational procedures link to it.

Having a well-defined and holistic approach towards the availability of flexible working options and linking these to remuneration are two key issues. The recognition of flexible working in organisations should be on a formal basis. Giving formal recognition means having written structured policies on the use of flexible working options. This has the benefit of giving structure to individual freedom, and helping individual's recognise what is available to them. It also makes a statement about the commitment of the organisation to the use of these practices and improves manageability. Manageability is also supported by offering flexibility to all individuals, especially by operating exemption policies. Exemption policies mean that the flexible working options available in the organisation are offered to all individuals unless the organisation can show specific reasons not to offer a particular working time practice to a specific person or job-position. Exemption policies also creates an image of equity, so that although the use of such working practices may remain concentrated in specific groups of employees, a policy of fairness is created.

Use of flexible working should be linked to other HR practices. Organisations that are moving in the direction of total remuneration policies and 'new pay' (Heery, 1996; Zingheim and Schuster, 1995) are likely to find flexible working a useful part of the rewards portfolio. The ability of flexible working options to attract, retain and motivate

employees justifies their use as a reward. Making them a part of the remuneration portfolio has the added advantage that individuals think of it as a privilege that the organisation is offering them, and can also see more clearly the time-income trade-offs which are involved in many flexible working practices. Thus, as base pay, bonuses, and benefits are all being individualised in the 'new pay' (Heery, 1996; Zingheim and Schuster, 1995), individuals should be given the opportunity to negotiate (and renegotiate) working time as part of their contract, not just moulding working time to personal life needs but totally moulding careers to personal lifestyles.

The use of flexible working practices and their integration with other HR practices will depend on the business strategy of the organisation, and the organisational culture and corporate profile management wants to create. However, due to pressures from the individual, and a growing awareness of the subject, the use of individual-friendly flexibility is a topic that cannot be ignored by any organisation. Leading the change towards work-life harmonisation by introducing flexible working options can help organisations attract and retain quality employees, and be a source of competitive advantage. It can also create a society-friendly corporate profile and affect consumer purchase decisions, which lead to direct financial success.

3.3 TOWARDS THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This literature on the employee and the employer suggests that influences resulting in an increase of flexibility are growing, and are likely to become stronger in the future. For the individual, flexibility improves the harmonisation of work and personal life. For the organisation, flexibility can be a work-life issue, or a response to changing business needs. Innovative HR management should enable organisations to create flexible working patterns that match the needs of the organisation and the individual. Such practices are likely to lead to a change in the use of working time, shaping working practices for the post-industrial world.

Figure 3.1 summarises the main factors that arise from the review of the employee and the employer perspectives, and how it is proposed these come together to influence the use of flexible working options in the future.

For the individual, the increased economic activity rates of women at all life-cycle stages, dual career couples, working fathers, lone parents, an ageing population (higher elderly dependency ratio), and students in the workforce (a higher child dependency time) are the main **demographic changes** that affect work-life issues and generate **work-family** and **family-work conflict**. Simultaneously, restructuring and downsizing **changes at work** have altered individuals, and led them to rethink their personal values and career aspirations in the face of increased stress, responsibility and workload in all jobs.

The result of these demographic and work changes is to change **the needs, attitudes and expectations of people towards work, life and careers**. Research shows that there is evidence of over-employment (people working too much) in the UK labour market and individuals' approach towards life is changing. There is a group of people who want more balance, less stress and more time in their lives, and flexible working options are the way to achieve this change. A growing demand for part-time work, increase in use of temporary work for reasons of personal autonomy, and growth of self-employment as a lifestyle option, are evidence of the changing needs and attitudes of the labour force.

At the same time, **organisations** are also increasing their **use of flexible working**. The main reason for this increased use of flexibility by organisations is that it suits their changing business needs. Changing demand, technological advances, a twenty-four hour culture, unpredictability/variability of work environment, shorter product life-cycles, tasks of limited duration, specific skill demands, all make a strong business case for increased use of flexibility.

However, some organisations have also introduced flexible working options as part of **family-friendly programmes**. While the idea is to accommodate individuals' needs for flexible working, the introduction of employee-friendly flexibility also has **business advantages** in the form of positive effects on employee productivity, morale, mental and physical health, and lower stress, absenteeism, and turnover. In addition, such flexibility can also help attract and retain employees from a diverse and larger pool of applicants, and create an employee-friendly image of the organisation in society. The benefits of these to the organisation are reflected in competitive advantage gained

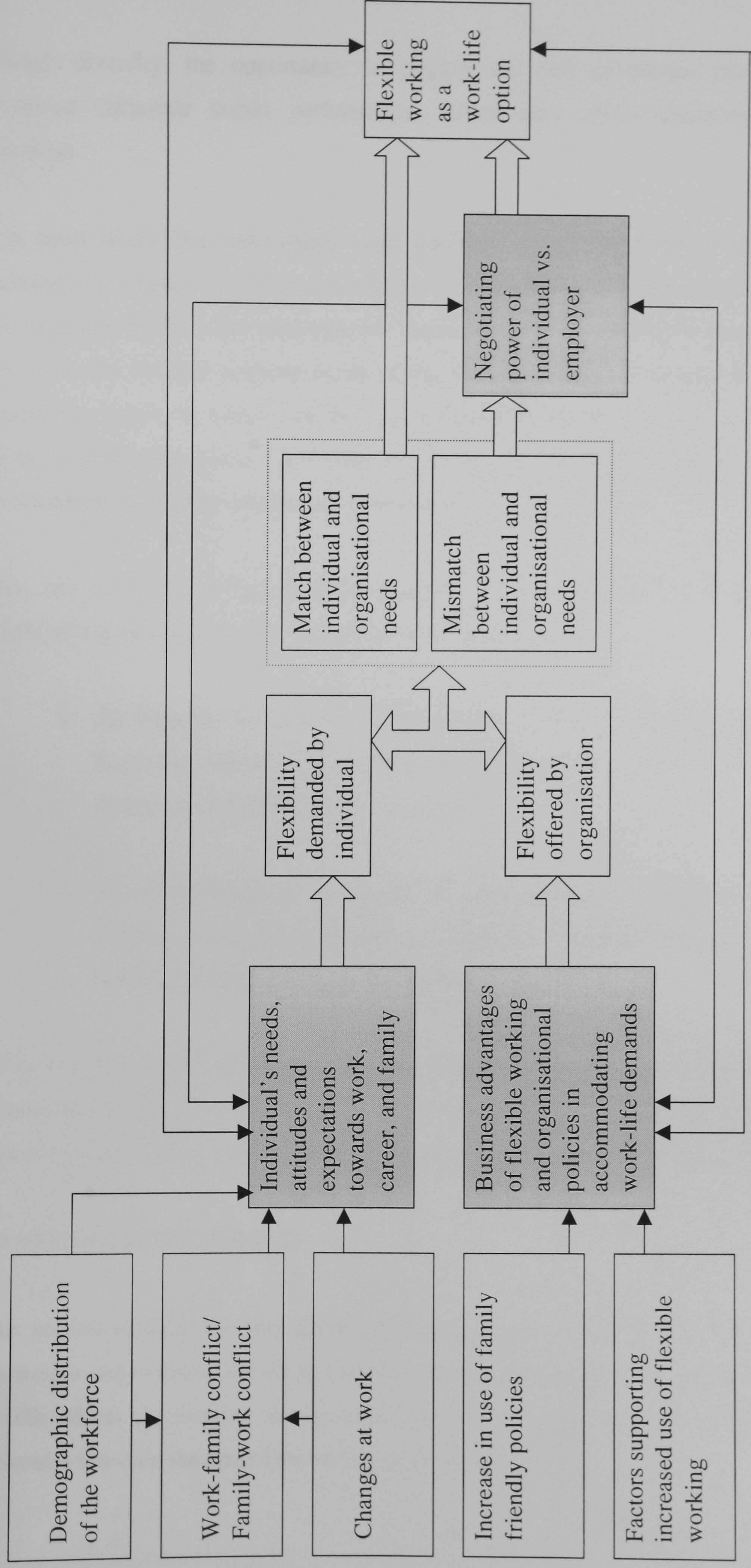


Figure 3.1: The research framework

through diversity, the opportunity to employ the best of human resources, and improved corporate social performance, which may affect consumer purchase decisions.

It is most likely that **individuals' and business needs for flexible working** will increase in the future. A situation where there is a perfect **match between the needs of the two sides** leads to the ideal case for implementation of flexible working practices. However, the flexible working needs of the individual and the organisation will not necessarily match, in which case the use of flexibility in the organisation will depend on the '**negotiating power**' that each side holds. The outcome of this will determine the adoption of **flexible working as a work-life option**.

Thus, the three shaded boxes of the research framework (Figure 3.1) are the focal points of this research, and the project has two main objectives:

- 1. To develop an understanding of the social and organisational dynamics that could be leading to the long-term development of employee-friendly ways of working.**
- 2. To comprehend the dynamics of negotiating power between the employee and the employer, to learn how long-term change in work-life policies is likely to develop.**

While relevant social and organisational dynamics have been discussed in detail in this chapter and in Chapter 2, and are the roots of the framework, the concept of negotiating power requires further development; a task undertaken in the next section.

3.4 NEGOTIATING POWER

This section expands the concept of negotiating power in the work-life context. This discussion supplements the ideas already established through the research framework, i.e. the effects of changing demographics and business attitudes on influencing power dynamics between the employee and the employer.

This section does not aim to review the literature on power. The principle area of research remains work-life balance – power dynamics, and hence the literature on power, are explored to understand possibilities for the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working. Nevertheless it is found necessary to briefly touch on the subject of power, since it is used as a lens to view the changes.

This review serves several purposes. It provides a brief overview of the power literature, to explain how different bodies of literature have defined and explained its core concepts in a divergent manner. It also lays the foundations for the theories of power that are used later in this section, and in the remaining thesis. Finally, it helps explain why in order to understand power, the research strategy (explained in detail in Chapter 4) involved theory testing and building.

3.4.1 A brief overview of power

Power is typically seen as the ability to get others to do what you want them to, probably against their will (Dahl, 1957). However, power is also exercised, consciously or unconsciously, when energies are devoted to creating, maintaining or reinforcing existing values and practices. This has been labelled as the second or hidden face of power (Bacharach and Baratz, 1962). It can be described as a process whereby issues are excluded from decision-making. Thus, while the first definition describes power over behaviour, the second concept stresses non-decisions⁶.

To understand power, another point that needs clarification is the diversity in the *sources* of power as discussed in the literature. Structural arrangements, hierarchy and authority are the sources identified by the founding literature on power (Marx, 1954; Weber, 1978). Power originating from these sources has been labelled as *legitimate* power. *Illegitimate* power is the power exercised outside hierarchical structures and the

⁶ There is also a third-dimensional view of power (Lukes, 1974) which operates at the subconscious level. It was not the intention of this project to explore this dimension. However, as it emerged during the analysis of empirical data, and is discussed in Chapter 10, it was found appropriate to recognise its existence at this stage.

channels they sanction. Some examples of sources of power are technical knowledge, coping with uncertainty, difficulty in substitutability, possessing information, credibility, stature, control over money and rewards (Mechanic, 1962; Crozier, 1964; Hickson et al., 1971; Pettigrew, 1973; French and Raven, 1968; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1974). Hardy and Clegg (1996) explain that the list of all possible sources is almost infinite, and without a total theory of contexts, which is impossible, one can never achieve closure on what the bases of power are. Different things become sources of power under different circumstances.

But not all scholarly research on power has found it essential to identify sources of power. For Foucault (1977 and 1980) and those influenced by him, understanding power requires one to explore its strategic role. That is, all individuals (or groups of individuals) exist in a web of power relationships. At any point in time, power can exist at any of the nodes of this web. In this strategic role, power is no longer a convenient or manipulable resource.

Similarly Giddens' (1979) explained power as a transformative capacity – the capability of an agent to accomplish their will. To have power, an individual (or agent) should have the capability of intervening, or refraining from intervening, in a series of events so as to be able to influence their course. A linked duality of action exists in Giddens' explanation of power. Power is a resource drawn upon by agents in the production and reproduction of the structural characteristics of society. This duality makes it obsolete to identify sources of power, and creates a notion of power which has similarities to the Foucauldian web of power.

In attempting to understand the power-web which influences the behaviour of organisational actors, it must be kept in perspective that organisations exist in an external environment which influences organisational behaviour and power relationships. In addition to technical and economic demands, environments also make social and cultural demands that require organisations to play certain roles in the society. Thus, organisations adapt to the values of the external society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). However, through understanding the environment, organisations can understand their power relationships with other actors

in the environment, and hence exercise choice in adaptation to external pressures (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991).

Thus, power is a concept which can be defined in a variety of ways. It can be used to influence behaviours, and confine agendas to the more appropriate questions. Although there are many sources of power, it is not essential (or always possible) to define sources of power. The study of power can involve understanding the actions of certain individuals or groups in the strategic context.

3.4.2 Power and work-life balance

Understanding the diverse nature of power, this project aimed to explore the concept of power in the work-life context. Desk research and exploratory interviews (in which the research framework, Figure 3.1, was discussed with the interviewees in selected pressure groups and some representatives of organisations that were high-users of flexible working) allowed the development of a few theoretical arguments which are discussed below. These concepts of power, and their influence on work-life policy development in the future, supplement the influence of social and organisational dynamics on this change as discussed through the research framework. That is, the influence of power discussed in this section works in tandem with the effects of changing demographics and business attitudes on influencing power dynamics between the employee and the employer.

Centrality and substitutability of knowledge, skills and position

It is argued that one of the main characteristics that increases an individual's significance to the organisation, is the knowledge, skills and position of the individual in the organisation, and the centrality and substitutability of these, for successful operation of the business. This proposition derives from the strategic contingency theory (Hickson et al., 1971). Therefore, knowledge workers or skilled professional are likely to have greater negotiating power in the organisation, especially if their knowledge and skills are scarce in the labour market.

As skill levels required of an average employee are increasing (Walsh, 1997), and job growth is most likely to be in the skilled areas with prediction of skills deficiencies in

some areas (Walsh, 1997; Business Strategies Limited, 1996; Harris, 1997; Rajan, 1992), it is surmised that the negotiating power of the average employee is likely to increase.

Existing work-life literature supports the importance of skills and knowledge as a negotiating power factor. Studying the influences of employee groups in designing work-life policies, Bardoel (1998) found that organisations were more likely to have alternative career paths when the principal occupational category was at the upper end. Similarly, Ingram and Simons (1995) found that a greater proportion of women managers in an organisation lead to greater involvement in work-family issues. However, in addition to skills, an organisation may be dependent on a group of employees for other reasons. Thus, organisations which have high dependence on female employees and parents take a greater interest in work-life issues (Goodstein, 1994), since lack of such policies may result in high turnover and difficulty in substitutability.

Length of service with the organisation was another factor considered in exploring power of the employee. Exploratory interviews indicated that experience of the individual in an organisation can improve their negotiating position, as length of service can result in centrality and difficulty in substitutability.

The ability to accomplish their will

Another factor which is reasoned to influence the power of the individuals (or groups of individuals) is the conscious or unconscious reaction of the individual (or groups of individuals) to the unavailability of their desired work-life balance. This dimension of power was highlighted during exploratory interviews carried out with various pressure groups, and organisations which were high-users of work-life policies. Several interviewees brought attention to the fact that failure to accommodate work-life issues may result in a variety of reactions by the individual. Decreased motivation and productivity, absenteeism, search for another job, moves to another job, a shift to self-employment, or leaving work/ paid work altogether are the broad possibilities. These have been discussed in the work-life literature. However, in the exploratory interviews, it was stressed that the ultimate power of the individual is their '*ability to vote with their feet*', a concept which had not been explored in depth in existing literature.

A theoretical explanation exists for this association between power and 'ability to vote with the feet'. It is what Giddens (1979) called a transformative capacity or *the ability of agents to accomplish their will*. He argues that an individual has power if s/he is able to influence their course. Hatch (1997) describes this as a new dimension of power, stretched between the two poles of domination and submission. This power does not come from position of authority, or through one's own authority (e.g. knowledge, charisma, contacts). It is simply the power to act.

We argue that all individuals hold this power irrespective of their organisational position. The ability to exercise this power varies with personal circumstances, out-of-work responsibilities and interests. Because certain employee groups (e.g. married women with young children) have taken such actions in the past, the perception exists, and perhaps rightly, that such groups will 'vote with their feet' if not allowed to work flexibly. Thus, organisations which have high dependence on female employees and parents take a greater interest in work-life issues (Goodstein, 1994).

To understand this dimension of power, one must conceptualise it in the context in which it is being exercised. This ability to act is not a source of power in isolation. It derives its power from a duality of interaction (Giddens, 1979), which is set into motion by the action of certain individuals (or groups of individuals) leading to a series of events, which demand greater recognition. An individual exercising their power to act is like power being exercised at one of the nodes of the Foucauldian web. Behaviour of the surroundings is influenced by the action of an individual, and the play or drama through which Foucault describes the strategic, empirical and descriptive role of power begins. The merit of this view of power is that it allows for seemingly low power groups to achieve change.

Multiplicity of demand

Another factor influencing power is the 'multiplicity of demand'. This means that the organisation confronts incompatible and competing demands that make unilateral conformity difficult, because the satisfaction of one constituent often requires the organisation to ignore or defy the demands of another (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991).

This project applies the multiplicity of demand concept in two different contexts; to understand intra-organisational demands, and to comprehend organisation-environment interaction. Thus, it is argued that if a significant number of individuals (in an organisation) demand flexibility, and especially if no individuals or sub-groups are against the idea of having the options of flexibility available for themselves and/or others, the negotiating power of individuals' increases due to lack of multiplicity of demand. Similarly, if internal and external demands do not conflict, there is more pressure upon organisations to accommodate those proposals.

The environment

Expectations, demands and norms of the environment influence power relationships of organisational actors. Adapting a broad approach, possible influences of economic, social, cultural, technical, political and legal pressures were explored.

Among external factors, the **economic cycle** influences the power of the individual and organisations. The British Social Attitudes Survey (1997) shows how job tenure, turnover, voluntary mobility between employers, and expectation of finding another job if made redundant varies from economic recovery to recession. Overall, economic recovery gives employees more leverage in negotiating the terms and conditions of employment. However, national economic peaks and recessions are not always reflected across all sectors. Thus it is important to take the stage of the economic cycle of the sector and economy into account when studying the attitudes and expectations of individuals (and hence their negotiating power). These sectoral differences become more important for those employee sub-groups whose skills are less transferable across sectors. High unemployment rates have been associated with lower willingness of employer involvement in work-family issues (Ingram and Simons, 1995). Having said that, even in high unemployment, employers have been found to introduce policies to retain staff with specialised skills.

Government's interest in the topic of work-life, and the subsequent **legislative changes** have influenced employee-employer power relationships. Legislation directly influences managerial decisions and power, whereas government's interest affects **social and cultural norms** as well. Changes in this arena have been largely influenced

by integration with Europe. Many EU countries are at a more developed stage in offering work-life policies to their employees than the UK (New Ways, 1997; Lewis and Lewis, 1996). Since signing the Social Chapter, the UK has seen many legislative changes⁷. However, closer social integration with Europe is not likely to change legislation only. It also means that employees can see what other options are available, and how organisation and governments in other countries support the work-life balance of their employees. Similarly, organisations in the USA are also offering more work-life options than those organisations in the UK. This is likely to influence the expectations of employees and also their perceptions of what can be offered regarding work-life policies. Thus, a globally interconnected work environment alters norms and expectations, increasing pressure upon organisations.

The desire to improve work-life harmonisation through flexible working practices is also due to **technological** developments. Fewer jobs now require a 9-to-5 routine, productivity is measured in output not input, and many jobs are not repetitive tasks but involve generating new ideas and innovation. Technological advances also facilitate the use of flexible working options. This supports the desire of individuals to work flexibly, as it is possible for the organisation to provide the flexibility needed by the individual by redesigning work. It also brings ‘employee-friendly flexible working practices’ under the umbrella of factors that organisations can control or offer, and raises employee expectations (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch, 1997).

Organisational characteristics

Certain organisational features may also affect the use of flexibility – one such element is the relative power of **trade unions**. Despite the weakening of Trade Union power over the last two decades, they are relatively active in some sectors and do give individuals a collective voice. Their interest in the topic of work-life is reflected in the many reports published by the TUC (e.g. TUC, 1995; TUC, 1998a; TUC, 1998b). There is some evidence to support the effects of heavy unionisation on the availability of family friendly policies including flexibility (Bardoel, 1998). Forth et al (1997) have

⁷ The pace of change in this area has been rapid since the beginning of this project in 1997. See Section 3.6 for an overview of the legislation at the time when the fieldwork was carried out, and the developments since. These must be kept in perspective in understanding the research design, and empirical data, especially the management interviews.

also identified the role of unions in the development of family friendly working arrangements.

Employee-employer power is also influenced by industrial sectors. Sectoral trends significantly influence organisational response to external pressures. The influence of economic cycle stages, compatibility of the work with flexibility, technological developments, proportion of high- or low-knowledge workers all are influenced by industrial sectors. However, Goodstein (1994), Ingram and Simons (1995), and Morgan and Milliken (1992), highlight that sectoral trends become especially important when other organisations in the sector are offering work-life options. Adoption of such practices by key players in the sector can lead to voluntary diffusion, especially where the loss of a good employee by one organisation can mean a gain for a competitor. Similarly, the cost of replacing an individual also varies with sectors. Thus sectoral trends influence negotiating power.

In summary, power in the work-life context is a dynamic concept, with the employee-employer bargaining position likely to keep on changing. It is influenced by a number of factors which relate to intra-organisational dynamics, organisational characteristics, and/or environmental changes. While an attempt has been made to understand the factors, it is most likely that the power-web is more complex. Further, in the factors discussed, some of the influences which support the adoption of policies are cyclical (e.g. the business cycle), while others are long-term. Overall a large number of factors are supporting the long-term demand of employee-friendly flexible working, namely the heterogeneity of the workforce, increased employee expectations, the changing nature of jobs, high skill level requirements for all jobs, legislative changes, and developments in Europe and the USA. Their influence on the adoption of policies in the work-life area needs to be understood further.

3.5 ELABORATING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The thesis has so far identified the two main objectives of the project (Section 3.3) and the research framework (Figure 3.1.). This section elaborates the key research questions, while the overall research strategy is discussed in Chapter 4.

The research questions have their origin in the research framework (Figure 3.1). While this section attempts to state them explicitly to facilitate understanding, the questions are implicit within the framework. The framework helps us understand the development of flexible working as a work-life policy as a dynamic process and provides the foundations on which the arguments are developed. Thus the framework and the questions should be viewed in tandem to comprehend how individual attributes, desire for flexibility, negotiating power, and ability to work flexibly interplay with organisational characteristics, managerial opinions, and the environment which is, in the long-term, partially a product of these very factors. This interplay was considered to be an important element of the research design, since the aim of the project is not just to understand the present but to explore possibilities for long-term development.

Key questions can be divided into three areas, as identified by the framework – (i) the individual or employee, (ii) the business/organisation or employer, and (iii) negotiating power between the employee and the employer. The statements which guide research, and the reasons behind them, are discussed below under the appropriate sub-headings.

The individual

Desk research shows that there is an increasing proportion of women at all lifecycle stages, dual career couples, lone parents, and students in the workforce (Harris, 1997; Sly, Price and Risdon, 1997; DfEE, 1997; Social Trends, 1997). These groups are more likely to work flexibly or desire flexibility (LFS, 1997; Social Trends, 1997; Sly and Stillwell, 1997; Ralston, 1990; Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Lewis and Lewis, 1996). Thus, we propose that *changes in the demographic composition of the workforce are in a direction that will lead to an increase in demand for flexible working and work-life balance*, and to argue that *since the proportion of such employees is on the increase, organisations (in the future) are more likely to feel the pressure to provide flexibility*.

The research thus aimed to explore that women, women with young children, dual career couples (with or without children), lone parents and students have greater desire for flexibility and work-life balance than their counterparts. Recognising the growing eldercare responsibilities of the workforce (Harris, 1997), and the greater significance given to these in the work-life literature (William M. Mercer, 1996; Hewitt Associates,

1996; Shellenbarger, 1992; Lewis and Cooper, 1995; Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Bailyn, 1993), attitudes of individuals with such responsibilities were to be examined. Finally, the younger age group (Generation X, Cannon, 1995; 1996) has been shown to have more interest in leading a balanced life – thus, their attitudes were to be explored. It is presumed that those with eldercare responsibilities and the younger age groups will have greater desire to work flexibly. The aim was to understand any differences in employee opinion and managerial perception, to understand whether these attitudes increase pressure on organisations to provide flexibility.

However, at the same time, the project recognises that flexibility can be a policy desired by all individuals. Thus, women desiring more flexibility than men does not imply that the latter do not wish to work flexibly – just that a lesser proportion of men desire flexibility, or perhaps there is lesser recognition of their desire. Literature supports the necessity to acknowledge the needs of all individuals, especially men, whose needs may have been overlooked (Bailyn, 1993; Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Brannen, Meszaros, Moss, and Poland, 1994; Collingwood, 1996). Thus, in addition to focusing on the newer demographic groups, this study also aims to understand how the *demographic grouping of the individual influences their needs, attitudes and expectations towards (types of) flexible working*.

In addition to demographics, changes at work are influencing employee attitudes towards work, life and family. Research by other scholars shows that restructuring and downsizing have led people to rethink their personal values and career aspirations (Collins, 1996; Rousseau, 1995). Also, increased stress, responsibility and workload have been shown to influence desire for a better work-life balance (TUC, 1995; Coe, 1993; Benbow, 1993; Schor, 1991; 1995; Saltzman, 1991; Laabs, 1996; Ehrenreich, 1995). Thus, it is proposed that *changes at work influence needs, attitudes and expectations of individuals towards flexible working and work-life balance*.

The changes at work to be explored include effects of restructuring, downsizing, stress, responsibility, workload and long working hours. It is theorised that those who have been influenced by restructuring and downsizing will have greater desire to improve their balance through working flexibly. A similar attitude will be shown by those experiencing increase in stress, responsibility and workload.

Work-family conflict has been central in understanding work-life balance desires of employees. Existing literature shows that demographic grouping influences work-family conflict experienced by the employee (Frone and Yardley, 1996; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997; Judge et. al, 1994; Brett, Stroh and Reilly, 1992, Higgins and Duxbury, 1992; Schneer and Reitman, 1993; Bedeian, Burke and Moffett, 1988). Some evidence also exists for relationships between work-related characteristics and work-family conflict (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Judge et al, 1994). The negative effects of this conflict are well documented (see Table 2.1), and the acknowledgement of their existence is one of the reasons for increase in the use of family-friendly policies. Studies have shown that work-family conflict is reduced by using flexible working, and through a supportive work environment (Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Bruce and Reed, 1994; Rogers and Rogers, 1989). Thus, it is proposed that;

- *Changes in demographics are resulting in an increase in work-family conflict*
- *Changes at work are resulting in an increase in work-family conflict*
- *Work-family conflict has negative consequences for the organisation*
- *Work-family conflict is reduced by employee-friendly flexible working and by a supportive work atmosphere*

Women, women with young children, dual career couples (with or without children), lone parents, and those with eldercare responsibilities are speculated to experience greater conflict than their counterparts. Since the proportion of these employees is on the increase, it is proposed that without counter-prevailing measures, work-family conflict experienced by employees will increase.

Effects of stress, responsibilities, workload and working hours are the changes at work to be explored. It is theorised that increase in stress, workload and responsibilities results in greater conflict, and these are known to be on the increase. This increase is largely due to changing nature of jobs – more responsibility in the average job, and increasing proportion of high-status jobs – a trend likely to continue in the future. Similarly, longer working hours are hypothesised to result in greater conflict.

The organisation

Organisations are introducing flexible working practices to suit their changing business needs and/or as a part of family-friendly programmes (Olmsted and Smith, 1994; Bailyn, Fletcher and Kolb, 1997; Skyrme, 1994; McCampbell, 1994; Marcie, 1989; Wickham, 1997; Fanning, and Maniscalco, 1993; Gall, 1996; New Ways to Work, 1993; Huws, Korte, and Robinson, 1990; Casey et al., 1997; Nisbet, 1997; Huws, 1993, 1994; Hamblin, 1995). Thus, the research aims to understand two main elements of the behaviour of organisations, which have been suggested by the framework. These are

- *Business benefits that the organisation can achieve from flexibility will shape business attitudes towards changing working time practices, and*
- *Organisational perception of the benefits of family-friendly policies will influence the use of employee-friendly flexible working in the organisation.*

Negotiating power

The benefits of flexible working arrangements for individuals and organisations are well documented (e.g. Olmsted and Smith, 1994; Bailyn, Fletcher and Kolb, 1997; Skyrme, 1994; McCampbell, 1994; Marcie, 1989; Wickham, 1997; Fanning, and Maniscalco, 1993; Gall, 1996; New Ways to Work, 1993; Huws, Korte, and Robinson, 1990; Casey et al., 1997; Nisbet, 1997; Huws, 1993, 1994; Hamblin, 1995; Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Lewis and Lewis, 1996). Thus, we propose that *carefully designed and administered alternative working arrangements have mutual benefits for organisations and individual*, and aim to confirm these benefits.

Verifying perceived benefits by individuals and organisations would support the role of flexible working as a work-life policy. It would also highlight the significance of negotiating power. If both parties perceive benefits, it reduces the impact of bargaining power. Nevertheless, as the research framework identifies, although flexibility may be desired by both the individual and the organisation, the needs of both parties may not necessarily match. Thus, resulting policies will depend upon the negotiating power between the parties concerned.

Since labour market pull has been one of the main reasons behind the introduction of employee friendly flexible working (McGregor and Sproull, 1991⁸), we hypothesise that *a large proportion of employees desiring flexible working increases pressure on companies to adopt flexible working practices.*

However, organisations are more likely to accommodate employee desire if the pressure comes from employees who have greater negotiating power. One of the key characteristics that increases an individual's significance to the organisation is their knowledge, skills and position, and the centrality and difficulty in substitutability of these (Hickson et al., 1971). Thus, *organisations are more likely to accommodate employee desire for flexible working if the pressure to provide such policies comes from employees whose skills and knowledge are central and difficult to substitute.*

Since the proportion of high-skilled employees is increasing, and there is evidence that such employees are more likely to face greater conflict and desire flexibility, *pressure on organisations to provide flexibility is likely to increase in the future because of the increasing proportion of high-status employees in the workforce.*

The key idea behind power of the individual on the basis of skills, knowledge and difficulty in their substitutability, is the strategic contingencies theory (Hickson et. al, 1971). The resource dependence perspective (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Hatch, 1996) – through which these characteristics can be equated to be a critical resource – has been used to explore the adoption of flexible working policies (Goodstein, 1994; Bardoel, 1998; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Dex and Scheibl, 2001), though the critical resource in these studies was not necessarily skills and knowledge. However, skills and knowledge have been used as a critical resource by Barringer and Milkovich (1998) when theorising to understand the provision of flexible benefits plans, and Balkin and Bannister (1993) argue that employees holding critical jobs in an organisation can influence decisions about forms of pay. The unit of analysis in all these studies is the firm.

⁸ Recent data from the DfEE Work-Life Balance 2000 Baseline Study support this. However, this data was not available at the time of the research design.

Through exploratory interviews and the literature on power (Giddens, 1979; Foucault, 1977, 1980; Hatch, 1996), another dimension of power is identified – the ability of the individual to act or to accomplish their will. Thus, it is proposed that

- *If a large proportion of individuals in an organisation is willing to take action to achieve their desired work-life balance, the organisation will feel greater pressure to provide the flexibility desired by employees, and*
- *Individuals belonging to groups who are willing to take action to achieve their desired balance (or who have taken action in the past) will have greater negotiating power, through the perception that failure to accommodate their desires will result in a strong reaction.*

As discussed in Section 3.4, this ability to act is not a source of power in isolation, and must be studied in its context. However, a point that needs clarification in relation to this dimension of power is its relationship to individual groups in this study. The above statements imply that any individual can have this power to act, and the project supports this standpoint. However, literature and exploratory interviews support the view that women, especially those with young children, have been most active in exploiting their ability to act in the past. Thus at this point in time, empirical support for this idea of power is most likely to emerge through studying women (with children), and hence it is also proposed that

- *Women, and women with young children, may have greater (perceived) power due to their greater (perceived) ability to act to accomplish their will, and*
- *Since the proportion of women and women with young children in the workforce is increasing, and these groups have greater (perceived) ability to act to accomplish their will, pressure on organisations to provide flexibility will increase in the future.*

If other groups, such as fathers from dual-career families, start taking more action, the power of these groups will also increase. Similarly, if evidence starts to mount that a large proportion of single, young, higher educated individuals (Generation X, Cannon, 1995, 1996) are taking action to improve their work-life balance, their relative power will increase. That is, due to the perception that such individuals will not join

organisations, or will leave their current employers, if flexibility is not provided, organisations desiring to attract this young talent will provide more flexible working options.

Thus, certain employee groups, depending on their skills or demographic grouping, may have greater negotiating power. However, flexible working policies are unique in the sense that their use by certain employees, or groups of employees, directly influences the work of other employees in the organisation. Thus, attitudes of individuals regarding use of flexibility by other employees/individuals is likely to influence employee-employer power dynamics through the 'multiplicity of demand' concept (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). This means that the organisation confronts incompatible and competing demands that make unilateral conformity difficult, because the satisfaction of one constituent often requires the organisation to ignore or defy the demands of another. The absence of incompatible views increases pressure upon organisations to comply with the demands. Thus, we propose that *the lack of polarisation of attitudes among employee groups to the availability of flexible working for others increases employee power through strengthening the impact of employees' demands because of the absence of multiplicity of demand*.

However, power must be studied in its context. The economic cycle, unemployment levels (especially of the groups the organisation wants to attract), legislative changes, government's interest in work-life, social and cultural norms and the significance given to these by organisations, the image the organisations want to create, importance given by the management to diversity issues, trade union membership in the organisation, nature of the work and its compatibility with flexibility, adoption of practices by other organisations in the sector, all influence (or can influence) adoption of family-friendly policies (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Bardoel, 1998; Oliver, 1991; Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Lewis and Cooper, 1995). We theorise that this influence is because of their impact on the employee-employer power relationships. Thus, to understand possibilities for the long-term development of lifestyle-friendly flexible working, organisations must be studied in their context, as *power dynamics between the employee and the employer are influenced by environmental and organisational characteristics*.

As the pressure from legislation, social and cultural norms, trade unions and pressure groups (in the period 1997-2001 covered by the research) is to provide working conditions to improve work-life synergy, it is also proposed that

- *Possibilities for the long-term development of employee friendly flexible working are greater due to favourable institutional pressures, and*
- *Pressure on organisations to accommodate the work-life needs of individuals is greater due to lack of multiplicity of demand between internal (employee) and external (institutional) pressures.*

This project also aims to explore the influence on power dynamics between the individual and the organisation through the availability of alternatives for the former. Flexible working is a vague term, and covers a variety of alternative working arrangements. Two broad groups, which have both been associated with improved work-life balance (Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Olmsted and Smith, 1994; Nisbet, 1997; Fanning and Maniscalco, 1993) are internal and external flexible working options. Through the former, an individual remains the employee of an organisation but experiences temporal flexibility, and the latter imply a contract of services through temporary work and self-employment.

There are many questions surrounding the role of temporary work and self-employment in providing work-life balance. Why do organisations use external flexible working options? Is the use of such options the choice of the individual or the organisation? Labour market pull is one of the main reasons cited by employers for the use of such practices (McGregor and Sproull, 1991). Thus, the research aims to explore if temporary work and self-employment are considered to be options that provide better work-life balance. If so, are there any particular groups which use or desire them? Do individuals working on external flexible working contracts experience less work-family conflict than employees? If employees believe that self-employment and temporary contracts provide greater opportunities for work-life balance, why are there more employees than workers in the labour force? Thus, we propose to *explore the role of external flexibility* as we argue that if more employees are willing to work through these contracts *for a better work-life balance*, the negotiating power of employees will

increase, since their ability to take action (leave the organisation) will not be dependant on flexibility offered by other organisations.

Finally, accepting that power manifests itself in different ways, and that simply trying to identify a theory (or theories) of power is likely to lead to a reduced version of the truth (Hardy and Clegg, 1996), the above arguments were identified as aids for understanding the power dynamics, acknowledging that they could only generate a partial picture. Fieldwork would aim to uncover additional dimensions of power.

To summarise, the key propositions can be framed as a series of testable hypotheses as following:

H1: Changes in the demographic composition of the workforce are in a direction that will lead to an increase in demand for flexible working and work-life balance

H1a: Women (with children) will have a greater desire for flexible working and work-life balance

H1b: Dual-career households will have a greater desire for flexible working and work-life balance

H1c: The young will have greater desire for flexible working and work-life balance

H2: Organisations are more likely to accommodate employee desire for flexible working if the pressure to provide such policies comes from employees whose skills and knowledge are central and difficult to substitute.

H2a: High-status employees will have greater bargaining power

H2b: High-status employees will have greater access to their desired flexible working options as they have greater bargaining power

H3: Individuals belonging to groups who are willing to take action to achieve their desired balance (or who have taken action in the past) will have greater negotiating power, through the perception that failure to accommodate their desires will result in a strong reaction.

H3a: Women (with children) will have greater ability to accomplish their will

H3b: Women (with children) will have greater access to flexible working options as they have the 'ability to accomplish their will'

H4: The lack of polarisation of attitudes among employee groups to the availability of flexible working for others increases employee power through strengthening the impact of employees' demands because of the absence of multiplicity of demand.

We were interested in further research questions which have not been formulated as hypotheses, but have been elaborated otherwise in this section. Thus, at certain points in defining the research questions, where previous research, existing theories and concepts were useful sources of ideas, the research questions were more specific. These questions are the basis of the framework and of the more exploratory questions. Such an approach is supported by Mintzberg (1979) and Eisenhardt (1989). Through this process, the project aims to develop an understanding of the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working, focusing on the power dynamics.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the review of approaches to organisational flexibility, the forms this takes, and where it is most prevalent led to a discussion of the benefits to organisations. Putting these influences together with those previously discussed for employees in Chapter 2, we propose a research framework in which the adoption of family-friendly flexible working policies results from the convergence of these two sets of influences or from the bargaining power of particular groups of employees to enforce their claims. This 'negotiating power', it is argued, is primarily based on the knowledge, skills and position of individuals in the organisation, and their relative centrality and substitutability. However, it is also influenced by a range of other internal and external factors that affect the overall power dynamics. This framework establishes the main research areas and issues for analysis, which the research design and methodology, discussed in the next chapter, addresses.

Before moving on, it is considered important to highlight that since the time of establishing the research objectives, designing the methodology and carrying out the fieldwork, there have been considerable developments in the legislative framework in

the UK. At the time of the fieldwork (1998), the statutory maternity leave was 14 weeks. The Employment Relations Act 1999, which introduced changes in maternity leave and the Parental Leave Directive, was introduced after the fieldwork had been conducted. Additional relevant legislation has also been introduced since 1998, which are mentioned in Section 10.1. Also, the WERS 1998 (Cully et al, 1999) and the DfEE baseline study (Hogarth et al., 2001), which are large-scale surveys addressing work-life issues in the UK, were carried out after the fieldwork had commenced.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research strategy and methodology, and describes the process of fieldwork. It is divided into the following sections:

1. Research strategy
2. The employee questionnaire
3. The management interviews
4. The process of fieldwork
5. Approach to data analysis
6. Limitations and adjustments

Comparison is made between various options to carry out research and data collection, and the reasons for the final choice are highlighted. Selection of sectors and organisations is discussed. The instruments of data collection used are explained in detail. Particular attention has been given to the design of the employee survey as it is the main tool of data collection.

The story of fieldwork is told, from the timetable followed to difficulties encountered. Processes of pilot testing, sampling, distribution and collection of survey are outlined. The approach to data analysis is explained. Finally, some adjustments that had to be made to the originally desired data analysis are discussed, and the reasons behind it are highlighted.

4.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

This study aims to understand the possibilities for long term change in work-life policies, particularly the use of flexible working as a work-life policy. It focuses on changes affecting individuals and organisations that are increasing the significance of the work-life debate, and factors that are likely to influence the negotiating power between the employee and the employer.

Thus, a fieldwork methodology was required that would cover employee and employer perspectives. The method identified was case studies in selected organisations, based on survey of employees, semi-structured interviews with the management, and relevant company data about the introduction and use of flexible working and work-life options. Also, the companies to be studied should be users of employee-friendly flexible working practices. The following paragraphs explain these choices.

The decision to carry out case studies was fairly straight forward, since this would enable coverage of both the employer and the employee perspectives, and an examination of the balance of power between them. Despite this early decision many major questions remained to be answered about the research strategy. The most significant among these were the selection criteria for organisations and employees, the number of organisations to be studied, and the number of employees within each of these organisations.

Figure 4.1 explains the possible choices in selecting organisations and employees. The alternative strategies depended on two questions; (i) which employers/organisations to select, and (ii) which employees to sample within the selected organisation. The variable defining differences between employers, and between employees, was use of flexibility. That is to say, whether the organisation was a high user of flexible working or did not have flexible working practices in use, and whether to select only those employees who were known to be high users of flexible working (e.g. women with children) and collect their opinion only, or to collect the opinion of all employees.

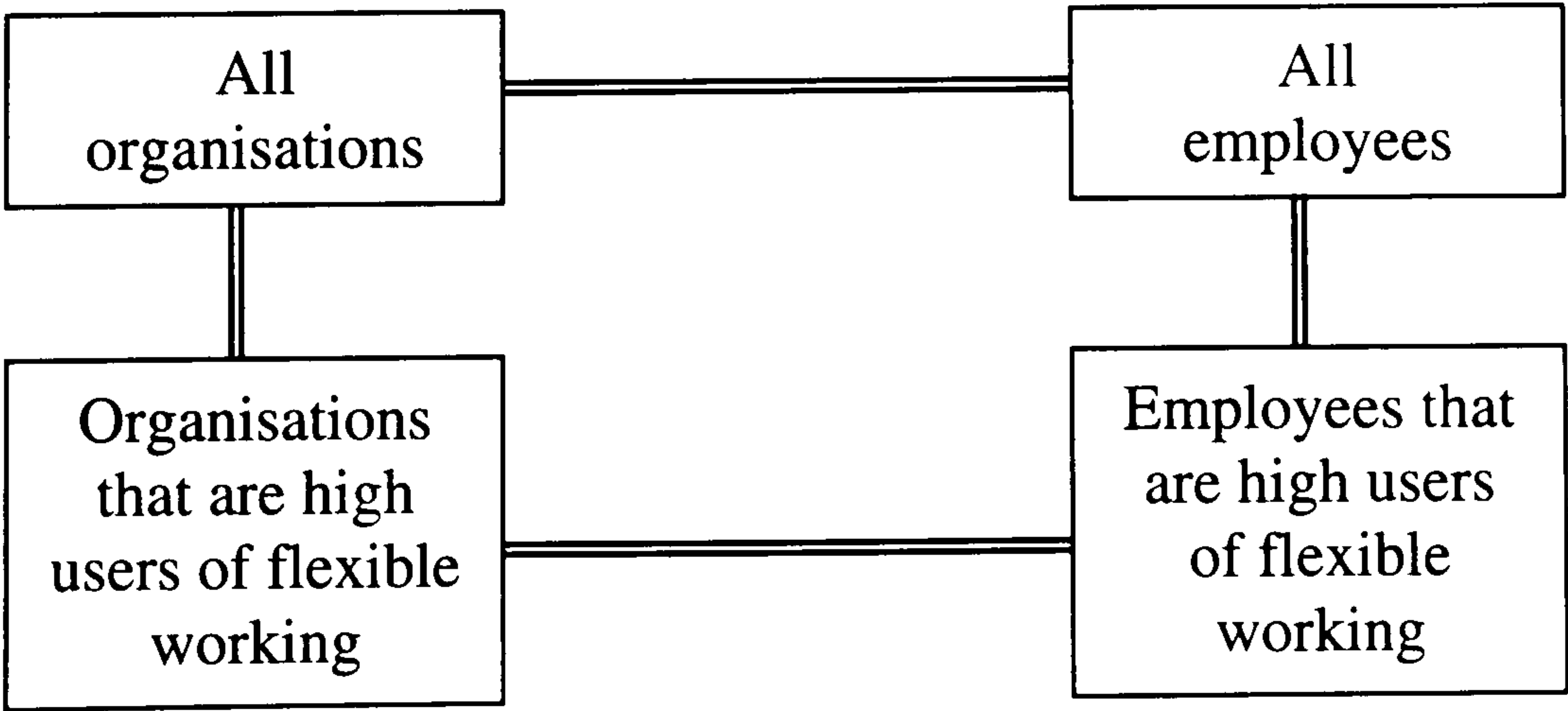


Figure 4.1: Choices in selecting organisations and employees

Employee selection: It was decided that the opinion of all employees in the selected organisations should be studied since studying only high users imposed restrictions. In this study, flexible working was selected as the main means to improve work-life balance as opposed to family friendly policies (like nursery places for children) specifically to understand the needs of all employees and to broaden the work-life debate. Selecting high users only would not allow comparison between demographic groups, and categorise work-life policies as dependant care policies, since those with dependants are known to be high users of flexible working policies. It would provide limited insight into the idea of negotiating power. In this concept of power, it is not only important to understand why some groups are high users of flexibility, but also, why others are not.

The above decision to include all employees also resolved the dilemma of sample size i.e. whether to go for small samples in many organisations or larger samples in a few organisations. It became apparent that a large sample of employees was needed so that the sample had significant representation of different categories to compare and contrast variations in attitudes towards flexible working and work-life. The categories should cover individuals belonging to various demographic sub-groups, and there should be adequate representation of individuals belonging to different hierarchical levels and occupational groups to understand differences in negotiating power. Deciding on a large sample also meant that the organisation(s) studied should be medium-to-large in size. Employee opinion would then be collected via questionnaire surveys since it is not practical to carry out such a large number of interviews.

Moreover, the need to study attitudes towards flexible working and compare opinions of users and non-users meant that the organisations to be studied should be using flexible working. In this way, the sample would be at least partially formed of individuals who had used, or had the option to use flexible working practices. Discussions on the benefits of flexible working and negotiating power with management or employees are more likely to be accurate in organisations that are using flexible working. Also, respondents in organisations that are using flexibility would understand concepts in the questionnaire since they had used flexible working or had seen their colleagues at work use various forms of flexible working practices.

Selection of organisations: While a single case study allows more in-depth analysis, selecting individuals from different organisations allows comparisons so that general trends can be identified. Selecting several organisations also allows us to distinguish between organisation-specific trends, throwing light on how and why organisations differ in offering work-life and flexible working practices. However, the need for large samples in each organisation meant that, due to resource constraints, no more than a few organisations could be studied.

Due to the reasons discussed above, the organisations selected should be (high) users of flexible working. It is hard to judge the true extent of use of flexible working in an organisation from the outside, and types of options used vary from sector to sector. Thus, a few sectors, which are high users of employee-friendly flexible working practices were selected, and then large organisations in these sectors were approached to judge their use of flexible working and their interest in the study. Choosing organisations from specific sectors as opposed to picking random high users should further enable differentiation between organisation-specific versus general trends. The intention was therefore to choose two organisations from each of two sectors which were high users of employee-friendly flexible working practices.

Sectors and companies: The main criterion for the selection of sectors and organisations was that they should be (high) users of employee-friendly flexible working practices. Such practices include flexi-time, compressed work week, job-sharing, voluntary reduced time, term-time working, home-working, extended maternity leave, paternity leave, sabbaticals, and career breaks. They may also include the use of part-time, temporary and self-employed workers, only when the use of these practices is by the choice of the employee or through mutual agreement between the employee and the employer, and not forced upon employees.

Two other factors were also considered. First, that the workforce should have some inherent bargaining power with the management. Thus, sectors with a skilled labour force would be a preferred choice. Second, since the aim of the study is futuristic, to understand long-term change in work-life policies, sectors which are growing or where growth is predicted would be given preference.

Services generally were higher users of employee-friendly flexible working practices. However, only one sector, 'banking, financial and business services', could be identified as suitable for the present study. Other sectors that were also high users of multiple forms of flexible working had shortcomings. For example, in the 'distribution, hotels and repairs' sector, it is generally accepted that the use of flexible working is dictated by the employer. Also, it is easier to provide flexibility to low-skilled workers, which are in the majority in this sector. The 'education' sector is another high user of flexible working practices, but as it has a history of high use of flexible working, studying it was not likely to produce results that could identify changing trends relevant to other sectors.

In addition to sector, organisations that were high users of flexible working practices and family friendly policies were specifically identified. A large number of organisations from the banking and financial services sector were included in this list (National Westminster, Midlands, Lloyds, Abbey National, Nationwide, Barclays, etc.), supporting the broad assessment of the sector. The other organisations identified, not belonging to the sectors that have been ruled out in the above paragraph, could be grouped into pharmaceuticals (Glaxo, SmithKline, Zeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Lilly industries), and electrical engineering broadly defined (viz. IBM, Hewlett Packard, Rank Xerox, BT, Motorola, etc).

As two sectors were required for the present research, it was decided not to choose pharmaceuticals since there are only a few major players left in this sector following repeated mergers and acquisitions. The two sectors identified for the study were therefore 'banking, financial and business services' and 'electrical engineering'.

4.1.1 Research methodology

The research methodology was case studies based on triangulation, involving survey questionnaires to collect employee opinions, and questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with managers to comprehend the organisational/managerial perspective in selected organisations. Company information on organisational work-life policies and flexible working practices was also discussed at appropriate times. This section

elaborates the reasons behind this choice, and its strengths and weaknesses in the light of the research questions to be addressed.

Case studies were considered to be the appropriate method since it would allow comparison between employee and employer attitudes, and the study of power in its context. Since the research questions demanded comparison of attitudes between individuals on the basis of a variety of personal and work-related characteristics, questionnaire surveys were used to collect the employee perspective. Surveys enable the researcher to collect the opinions of a large number of respondents from the population of interest. For this purpose, questionnaire surveys are the most cost and time efficient. Moreover, the systematic coded information that is collected through this method allows comparison of data, which was desired to explore similarities and differences between the case-study organisations.

However, surveys have their limitations. A major limitation relevant to this research design was that survey data shows associations, and cause-and-effect relationships cannot be established confidently, especially in cross-sectional designs. This weakness questions its suitability for studying the process of change. While longitudinal designs improve explanatory power, time limitation did not allow the use of such design.

Singleton, Straits and Straits (1993) and Bulmer (1977) explain that despite this limitation, cross-sectional surveys are widely used in such studies. To understand associations, inferences are often made about the logical relations among variables, and to understand change, respondents can be asked about both past and present events. However, these sources of evidence can be fallible. They recommend that it must be kept in perspective that variables have been measured at a single point in time when understanding the data and making interpretations.

Some of the short-comings of a questionnaire survey were compensated for by the comprehensive research methodology. Studying cross-sectional data in its context improves the ability of the data to describe accurately certain characteristics of that context (Singleton et al, 1993). Thus carrying out surveys within companies was likely to improve the inferences that could be drawn from the data. Further, the data collected was to be used in conjunction with managerial interviews, and cross-referenced against

in-house data where possible. This improved confidence in using a survey to collect the employee perspective.

To further overcome the weaknesses of questionnaires, it was decided that the managerial perspective should be gathered through instruments or approaches which do not share the same methodological weaknesses – hence triangulation. The term triangulation applies to situations in which two or more dissimilar approaches are used. If the methods produce the same findings, then confidence in the results increases (Singleton et. al, 1993). Thus face-to-face interviews were carried out with managers.

Face-to-face interviews allow the use of open-ended questions, which require respondents to answer in their own language and provide a more complete response. They allow for the question to be clarified or restated, and also to explore responses further by using probes. It is a useful method to gather qualitative data especially when exploring key concepts (which was not possible through the employee questionnaire). Also it is possible to carry out long interviews. While face-to-face interviews are costly, it was decided to keep the number of interviewees low to keep the cost down. However, several interviews were to be carried out in each organisation to improve reliability.

Thus interviews were to be used to replicate some of the survey questions, to provide multiple sources of data for the same problems. However, there were many research areas which could not be explored through the employee questionnaire, either because the questions were more exploratory, or because it was considered that an average employee would not be able to understand these questions. The interview also provided the right methodology to further explore the topic of power with the aim of generating theories to complement arguments already developed through desk research and preliminary interviews. As the research design developed, it was found that the interview time could be used more productively if the interviews were preceded with a managerial questionnaire. This questionnaire replicated some of the survey questions and provided the foundation for the interviews.

There are some weaknesses common to both methods used. They rely on reports of behaviour, and not observations of behaviour. Thus responses can be subject to reactive effects e.g. giving socially desirable answers. A more positive response may be

generated because of increasing significance given to work-life issues in the UK. Also, data gathered would rely on individuals' knowledge and perceptions (e.g. of policies in the organisation), and any longitudinal element added through questions on the past would be susceptible to problems of recall, creating reliability issues.

There were also negative implications in selecting organisations for case-study research. The individuals studied would only be current employees of these organisations, and thus the opinion of self-employed and temporary workers was less likely to be obtained. The opinion of these employees is highly significant to explore some of the research areas. Thus, it was decided that a request would be made to all organisations to forward surveys to their contract workers as well.

More important, though, the employees with these organisation would be those who were relatively happy with organisational policies, introducing sample bias. Also, organisations offering work-life policies may attract employees who are likely to have a greater desire for work-life balance (this was more likely to hold true for Company A, who was at a more advanced stage of offering work-life policies). Those not interested in work-life issues may also not complete the questionnaire (non-response bias). On the other hand, in organisations which offer work-life policies, employees who have been able to create their desired work-life balance may not be motivated to respond to yet another questionnaire. Thus, the organisations selected would influence the results. These biases should be kept in perspective in the analysis, and when generalising results.

Nevertheless, case studies can be used to accommodate various aims – to provide description, test theory or generate theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). They allow the use of an iterative approach of checking data against theory and vice versa (Eisenhardt, 1989). Using multiple methods within the cases provides stronger substantiation of constructs and hypothesis, especially the combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence. This combination of data types has been regarded as highly synergistic (Eisenhardt, 1989; Mintzberg, 1979).

Quantitative evidence can indicate relationships which may not be salient to the researcher. It also can keep researchers from being carried away by vivid,

but false impressions in qualitative data, and it can bolster findings when it corroborates those findings from qualitative evidence. The qualitative data are useful for understanding the rationale or theory underlying relationships revealed in the quantitative data or may suggest directly theory which can then be strengthened by quantitative support.

(Eisenhardt, 1989:538)

For while systematic data create the foundation of our theories, it is the anecdotal data that enable us to do the building. Theory building seems to require rich description, the richness that comes from the anecdote. We uncover all kinds of relationships in our hard data, but it is only through the use of this soft data that we are able to explain them.

(Mintzberg, 1979:587)

Thus, in a project where some element of theory were emerging, while it was desired to explore and build the theory further to create a more comprehensive picture, case studies with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were found to be the most appropriate research method.

The Employee Questionnaire (Appendix A) is discussed in detail in Section 4.2. The Organisational Questionnaire (Appendix B), and Interview Questions (Appendix C) are discussed in Section 4.3.

4.2 THE EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

This section describes the employee questionnaire, setting out connections between questions and the key variables of the study. Some of the questions used were adopted from other studies (in these cases, the original studies have been clearly indicated and reasons for using the same questions are summarised). The employee questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. It is divided into five sections (A to E). These are:

- *Section A: Work History*, covering experiences at work
- *Section B: Type of Contract*, covering external flexibility contracts and attitudes towards these contracts
- *Section C: Work-life Policies*, covering use of internal flexibility options, and attitudes and expectations towards flexibility and work-life
- *Section D: The Future*, covering questions on negotiating power
- *Section E: You and Your Family*; covering questions to identify various categories of individuals

Each section, and the rationale for each set of questions is discussed in turn in the following sub-sections

4.2.1 Section A - Work History

Information on respondent's work background was collected to form independent variables for analysis on the core questions:

Length of service (A-1): It was thought this might influence negotiating power and/or expectations.

Reasons for choosing the job (A-2): A question was included to assess mindsets of individuals towards their careers and working life. The question was borrowed from another study (Guest et al., 1996), and provides a list of reasons for job choice. In the present study, the question was to measure differences in priorities and expectations of employees with different personal and work-related characteristics. As the question did not generate useful data in the present study, it has not been used in the analysis.

Experiences of redundancy or long-term unemployment (A-3 & A-4): Such experiences are likely to influence the attitude of individuals towards atypical contracts, flexible working and work-life balance.

Workload, stress and responsibilities (A-5): These are likely to have a negative effect on work-family life, and hence may create a desire for better work-life balance and flexible working.

Satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation (A-5): Although the negative effects of work-family conflict are well researched, these two items were included to confirm that negative effects existed in the organisations being studied, thus:

A-5: Generally speaking, over the last 5 years, have you experienced an increase or decrease in the trends given below in your own job(s).

	Please tick one in each row		
	Increased	Is the same	Decreased
Working hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Satisfaction with work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commitment to the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2.2 Section B - Type of Contract

This section inquired about the type of contract respondents had with the organisation, and their point-of-view on atypical contracts. Three types of atypical contracts were studied – part-time working, temporary contracts and self-employment. The information collected can be broadly divided into two categories: (i) details on the type of contract which were to form independent variables, to carry out analysis on the core questions, and (ii) employee attitudes towards atypical contracts which were among the core questions.

Working hours (B-1): These are likely to influence work-family conflict, work-life balance, and desire for flexible working. Thus a question was included to cover the hours worked.

Use of atypical contracts (B-2 to B-4): A set of questions were included to find out whether respondents were currently employed on an atypical contract, and whether this was at their own choice, dictated by the management, or by mutual agreement. This

distinguished between temporary and permanent contracts, and part-time versus full-time working. Data from these questions were used as independent and dependant variables.

Attitudes towards non-standard contracts (B-5 and B-6): Two questions was designed to find out if individuals were ready to take a larger share of responsibility for creating their work-life balance by using non-standard contracts. It was argued that if an individual is working on a part-time, temporary or self-employed basis with the aim of achieving a better balance, the individual carries a greater share of responsibility. The questions asked how respondents weighed the positive and negative side of the three types of contracts, and what they perceived to be the impact of these options on their lives and careers particularly in creating a better work-life balance. These included effects on basic pay, benefits package, job security, identity, status, and such beneficial effects as control over working time, opportunities to create better balance between work and family, to pursue outside work interests, etc.

Data on this would be analysed in relation to the independent variables on employee characteristics, to try to understand which groups favour particular options.

4.2.3 Section C- Work-life Policies

This section covers core questions on flexible working options and work-life balance. The first pair of questions (**C-1 and C-2**) helps understand **the present and future of flexible working practices and extended leave options** from organisational and employee perspectives. Three aspects surrounding these practices were covered – availability, use and desirability. ‘Availability’ refers to the existence of organisational policies, while ‘use’ reflects individuals’ response to organisational policies; ‘desirability’ mirrors employee choice.

Since ‘flexibility’ or ‘flexible working’ are broad terms with multiple meanings, specific types of flexible working options were analysed. Studying the options separately is vital to understand which options are popular, and among which employee groups, so that organisational possibilities and limitations in providing the most desired options can be explored. The definitions used in the questionnaire are shown in Table 4.1.

C-1 shows how the questions here were framed.

C-1: Please tick which of the options given below are available to you in your place of work, and which options would you like to be made available in the future. You may tick more than one in each row.

	I use this option or have used it in the last 12 mths.	I don't use this option, but it is available to me	This option is not available to me	I want this option to be available to me now or in the future	I am not interested in this option
Flexi-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compressed work weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary reduced time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job-sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Term time working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home-working (f/t)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home-working (p/t)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Benefits of flexible working (C-3): Users of flexible working were asked to report its benefits to find out if some groups found flexibility more useful. The question aimed to measure the overall perception of employees of a range of benefits on a 3-point likert scale.

Working atmosphere (C-4) in the organisation, especially supervisor and managerial support, has been known to have a significant impact on the work-life balance of employees. This topic was covered through a series of items measured on a 5-point likert scale. The word ‘organisational culture’ was deliberately avoided since it was thought that employees have preconceived ideas about ‘culture’ due to its frequent use.

Views on work-life (C-5): This multi-item question covered two separate areas – work-family conflict, and attitudes towards use of flexible working as a work-life policy.

Flexible working options
Flexi-time - work schedules that permit employees to choose their daily starting and quitting times within limits set by management.
Compressed work weeks - a standard workweek compressed into fewer than five days, e.g. 4 ½ day week or 9 day fortnight.
Part-time – working less than 30 hours per week
Voluntary reduced time - a time-income trade-off programme that allows full-time employees to reduce work hours for a specified period of time with a corresponding reduction in compensation.
Job-sharing – two or more employees sharing one job.
Term time working - the employee remains on a permanent contract as either full- or part-time, but has the right to (unpaid) leave of absence during school holidays.
Home-working (f/t) - to be an employee (on any type of contract) of the organisation but work full-time from home
Home-working (p/t)¹ - to distribute contracted working time between home and office.
Leave options
Extended leave options give employees choice in rearranging their working lives. The intention is that at some future date the employee will return to work with the same employer at either the same level or to the same job, retaining all or most of the service related benefits.
Extended maternity leave – maternity leave longer than the legally required 14 weeks.
Paternity leave – leave offered to working parents.
Sabbaticals - a period of paid/unpaid leave provided for social/educational purposes after a minimum length of service.
Career breaks – an unpaid leave taken in special circumstances.

Table 4.1: Definitions of flexible working options and extended leave options

Work-family conflict was measured by three items. Although several sources of work-family conflict have been identified, most researchers agree that the general demands of a role, the time devoted to a given role, and the strain produced by a given role are domain elements of work-family conflict. The questionnaire covered one statement on each of these dimensions. The statements were derived from the scale developed by Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian (1996).

¹ While homeworking can be at or from home, this definition stresses homeworking during contracted hours, and thus excludes those who may take work home otherwise.

The most comprehensive understanding of conflict comes from ‘general demands’. ‘Time-based’ conflict is more specific and occurs when the amount of time devoted to work interferes with performing responsibilities in the other role, and thus reflects particularly on the long hours and presentism culture. ‘Strain-based’ conflict occurs when strain created by one role interferes with performing the other role (for example, irritability and stress created by work interference with performing family duties). This last kind is perhaps more important for knowledge workers, and hence for the future, because one can leave behind the physical work, but it is difficult to leave behind the mental strain created by managerial or professional jobs.

The work-family conflict questions were intended to show if changing demographics or working practices were likely to result in an increase in conflict, and whether flexible working practices and a lifestyle-friendly atmosphere were likely to reduce it.

The first part of C-5 measured responses to these on a 5-point likert scale, while a series of further questions asked about flexible working as a work-life policy for oneself, and for others in the organisation, thus:

	Strongly Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly disagree
Flexible working options can help me balance my work and personal life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working options are a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working options should be made available to all employees in the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is unfair that the organisation accommodates dependent care responsibilities of individuals, but takes lesser interest in accommodating other personal needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family friendly policies should be expanded to make them employee friendly policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2.4 Section D – The Future

This section was designed to understand the scope for development of flexible working options as work-life policies. Most of the questions focus on the negotiating power of the employee.

Negotiating power through centrality and difficulty in substitutability (D-1): The first question of this section measures how important and replaceable is the employee and their skills. This corresponds to the Strategic Contingency Theory of Intra-organisational Power (Hickson et al., 1971) which defines these in terms of centrality and substitutability. Analysis of these questions to find differences between groups who think that they or their skills are important or not, will enable differentiation between those with higher and lower intra-organisational power.

Understanding differences in use, availability and desirability of flexible working, and desirability of work-life balance on the basis of intra-organisational negotiating power, will enable us to reflect upon the future of flexible working as a work-life policy as skill patterns and demography change.

Willingness to trade time for income (D-2 and D-3): Negotiating power of employees was assessed through the willingness of employees to trade income for more free time, an idea which has been considered central by other researchers in the work-life area. The underlying assumption was that those who are more willing to trade their income, are ready to make greater sacrifices, and hence either work-life balance is more important to them or they have stronger out-of-work needs.

The first in this pair of questions asked about such options as part-time working, job-sharing and term-time working, while in the second, to test the strength of willingness to make trade-offs, respondents were asked to indicate what proportion of income they would be willing to forego, as follows:

D-3: If you had a choice, would you trade-off a proportion of your pay for more free time.

Please tick one only

- No ☐
- 5 percent less pay for 5 percent more free time ☐
- 15 percent less pay for 15 percent more free time ☐
- 25 percent less pay for 25 percent more free time ☐
- a larger trade-off than all the above for more free time ☐

Readiness to vote with their feet (D-4): The ultimate negotiating power of individuals in an organisation comes from their readiness to vote with their feet. This reflects feminist and post modern perspectives on power, whereby power becomes ‘the capacity of agents to accomplish their will’ (Giddens, 1979; Jo Hatch, 1997). D-4 provided a range of options:

D-4: If your organisation is not ready to facilitate you in achieving work-life balance, which of the options given below would you choose?

Please tick one only

- Do nothing about it ☐
- Start looking for another job ☐
- Leave for another similar job (but better work-life benefits) ☐
- Leave for a job for which you are over-qualified but which has flexible working options ☐
- Become self-employed ☐
- Leave work/ paid work ☐
- Others (please tick and specify) ☐

Awareness of work-life policies (D-5): It is important in all this that employees are operating from knowledge. A brief question was therefore asked to assess the overall

knowledge and interest of employees in availability of work-life options, namely ‘Are you aware of the work-life options available in other organisations?’.

Relative responsibilities (D-6): Finally, a general question was asked about the perceived relative responsibilities of four stakeholders – government, organisations, individuals and trade unions – for bringing about change.

4.2.5 Section E – You and Your Family

A final section covered basic data on such matters as gender, age, educational qualifications, occupational groups, ethnicity, income, marital status, number and age of children, and whether a person was the primary carer of any dependants, to provide independent variables for analysing the core questions.

At the end of the questionnaire space was provided for open comments on work-life balance, and organisational policies affecting this.

4.3 THE MANAGEMENT INTERVIEWS

The organisational/managerial perspective was sought through semi-structured interviews, preceded by a brief questionnaire on flexible working in the organisation.

4.3.1 The Organisational Questionnaire

The questionnaire provided a basis for discussion in the interviews, and a framework for comparison between organisations. It was also designed to provide a formal comparison between the information from employers and employees on the availability and use of flexible working practices.

Questions were divided into four sub-groups (corresponding to those in the Employee Survey):

- *Internal flexibility options* (full-time workers): flexi-time, compressed week, and home-working.

- *Internal flexibility options* (reduced time workers): part-time, job-sharing, voluntary reduced time, and term-time working.
- *Leaves*: maternity, paternity, sabbaticals, and career breaks.
- *Atypical contracts*: temporary, self-employed, and part-time working.

4.3.2 The Interview

The interviews provided in-depth view of managerial/organisational attitudes. The opening questions (1-4) covered the introduction of present policies on flexible working, and plans for further expansion. These often triggered discussion on negotiating power between the employer and employees through the realms for adoption and change. Managerial perceptions and in-house research on the costs and benefits of providing flexibility were also discussed.

Managers were then asked about other HR policies in the organisation, and specific questions about work-life balance and other family-friendly policies, for example:

5. Do you regard your organisation as a progressive employer?
6. What policies or practices do you have (apart from flexible working arrangements) which you see as part of being a progressive employer?
7. What is your organisation's philosophy regarding work-life balance?
8. What other family friendly policies do you offer? e.g. dependant care, employee assistance programmes.

From here onwards, the questions had a broader theme. The next three questions provide information about the underlying thinking of the organisation on work-life balance, and its awareness of the relevant issues. Together, the responses may also provide some information on whether the organisation is providing flexibility as a work-life policy through strategic choice, or whether these policies just accumulated over time, for example:

9. How do you see the company's philosophy and policies relating to work-life balance and the family developing over the next 3 years or so?
10. Are you aware of what your competitors and other organisations are offering in terms of work-life policies?
11. Are issues of work-life balance driven by:
 - The needs of those with dependant care responsibilities,
 - The desire of the younger generation (Generation X), or
 - All employees?

Next, the concept of negotiating power was discussed in detail. Referring to the organisational questionnaire – which had information on whether the policies were used company-wide or not, to which occupational groups were they available, and if it was the employer or employee choice to switch to alternative working methods – reasons for differences in availability and use were discussed. Specific questions were asked about the negotiating power of the employee on the basis of skills and knowledge, and demographic grouping. Thus:

12. Why are flexible working arrangements and benefits available to some groups and not others/ to all. (see organisational questionnaire)
13. If the need/desire for flexibility of the individual is different to that offered by the organisation there is a conflict of interests. How this is resolved may depend on the 'negotiating power' of the individual. In your opinion, which if any, of the factors below affect the 'negotiating power' of the individual. Can you explain how?
 - Centrality of the individual/group in terms of the knowledge and skills they bring to the organisation
 - The demographic group to which the individual belongs (e.g. external support for women, specially with young children, by the government and pressure groups affect their negotiating ability.
 - The type of work done by the individual i.e. if the work can be done as easily under a flexible working contract as opposed to a standard contract.
 - The power and membership of Trade Union in the organisation.
 - What other organisations are offering (as role models or competitors for staff).

For question 13, interviewees were invited to comment on their own organisation, as well as in general.

Finally, institutional pressures upon organisations to provide work-life balance were discussed. Once again interviewees were invited to comment on experiences based on their own organisation, as well as in general, in a more open-ended discussion:

14. Which broader factors do you think influence the negotiating power between the individual and the organisation?
 - Economic cycle
 - Influences from Europe, through (e.g.) through the social chapter or through people being aware of the social demographic systems in some European countries.
 - Political climate - Labour versus conservative
 - Change in social values
15. Any other comments on the idea of negotiating power as a factor influencing the adoption of work-life or family-friendly policies?
16. Do you have any views on the relative responsibilities of organisations, individuals, the government, and trade unions to create better harmonisation of personal and working life.

Company information from secondary sources was introduced during the interviews at appropriate times.

4.4 THE PROCESS OF FIELDWORK

Preliminary interviews to shape thinking were carried out in August 1998. Pilot testing of the Employee Survey started in December 1998, and the main process of data collection was carried out during May-October 1999, with some final interviews in March 2001. This section tells us the story of how the fieldwork was carried out in chronological order.

Preliminary Interviews: Interviews were carried out with two pressure groups (New Ways to Work and Opportunity 2000), and the Equal Opportunity Managers in a number of large organisations during August-September 1998. The main ideas behind the research were discussed with the aim of improving the focus of research.

Pilot testing: The final draft of the questionnaire was tested with work colleagues, and a small sample in the organisations to be surveyed. However, testing was informal and the data from these pilot-tested questionnaires was not analysed. Each returned questionnaire was followed by a discussion. In all, thirteen people completed the questionnaire, returned and discussed it. The modified questionnaire was then tested in organisations.

Approaching Organisations: Organisations were approached for the first time during January 1999, when the first phase of pilot testing of the questionnaire was almost complete. The targeted organisations were known to be high users of flexible working through desk research, and in the financial services sector or electrical engineering sector.

Although many organisations showed initial interest, it became apparent that the organisational time and commitment required, particularly participation in an employee survey by a few hundred members of staff, was not acceptable to many organisations. In addition to general concerns – organisational time, and employees being overloaded with surveys – the questionnaire raised a specific concern that a detailed questionnaire on work-life balance to several hundred employees would raise employee expectations that the organisation was planning to make changes in this area.

A few organisations also said they had carried out an internal survey on work-life balance over the last few years, and were introducing flexibility as a result. Hence they were not interested in participating in another survey. This suggested there was a small window of opportunity for such a project – a phase when an organisation was thinking of expanding its use of employee-friendly flexible working.

By March 1999, co-operation had been secured from only one company, Company A. Thus, the selection criteria were relaxed and more organisations were approached in March and April 1999. In this second round, the criteria were simply large organisations in the selected sectors, and not necessarily high users of flexibility.

The next few months were perhaps the most difficult time during the whole project. Many organisations indicated high interest but kept postponing the final commitment. Four said that September/October was a time more suitable for them, but were not ready to finalise arrangements. Discussions and phone calls continued, delaying fieldwork.

In desperation, a third sector, pharmaceuticals, was also approached in June/July 1999. However, the first round of phone calls did not give satisfactory results and hence this sector was not pursued further.

At this stage an alternative research strategy was considered. Many organisations approached had indicated willingness to give interviews, and some had mentioned during interviews that their in-house annual surveys had a few items covering work-life balance or flexible working. Thus, it was thought that a detailed case-study in Company A, could be supplemented by interviews and secondary data from other organisations in the two selected sectors.

Organisations were approached again for this second phase of the study. Though some said that their annual in-house survey was confidential, a large enough proportion (eight) were willing to share their data. However, only a few had items that could be considered relevant to the present study, and these could not form an adequate secondary source of data. Further, information on demographics, on changes in work, and on factors that were thought to define negotiating power were absent from all the

surveys. This exercise, however, proved one point. At least some organisations were interested enough in work-life to have items like 'Working for this company, are you able to balance your working life with your life outside work' in their annual survey.

At the end of August 1999, all the companies, especially those who had indicated September 1999 to be their preferred time-period to participate in the study, were approached again. Fortunately, one more organisation, Company B, from the telecommunications sector (a sub-category of the electrical engineering sector) agreed to participate. However, they were only willing to survey employees at one work-site. This limitation was accepted.

Company A – Pilot testing, Timetable, Sampling, Distribution and Collection:

Company A was given the choice to pilot-test the Employee Survey questionnaire in any part of the organisation. Instead of formal pilot testing, four managers opted to complete and discuss the questionnaire, on the basis of which further refinements were made.

Data collection started in Company A in May 1999, when the organisational questionnaire was forwarded to five individuals.

1. Head of Retail Operations (South)
2. Head of Mortgage Operations
3. General Secretary - Staff Union
4. Senior Manager – Customer Services
5. Corporate Personnel Consultant

The criteria for selection were senior members of staff, HR personnel and/or those involved in policy. A request was made for an interview with one senior union member. Interviews were carried out during May/June 1999.

The employee questionnaire was targeted as follow:

Company A, has nearly 13,000 employees, 3,500 of whom are employed in non-retail, the remaining in the retail area. The survey was sent to 500 employees, divided equally

between retail and non-retail. This equal distribution allowed adequate representation of non-retail employees, and the opinion of retail employees was not repeated unnecessarily.

Strata were defined in retail and non-retail, and employees were selected through systematic random sampling with differential probabilities of selection from the employee database (arranged on the basis of hierarchy) to achieve the desired number from each stratum. For non-retail, the 250 employees were selected from the three main functions – IT, marketing and insurance. For retail, four geographical areas were selected which had between 200-300 employees each, and 50 employees were selected in each of these locations. To reduce geographical bias, two areas were selected in the north of England and two in the south. Fifty employees were selected from customer services (a call centre). This aim of this distribution was to obtain an adequate sample, with minimum bias, and a heterogeneous mix of status and lifestyle influences, within the financial and time constraints.

The questionnaire was distributed by the company, as the organisation was not prepared to disclose a list of its employees, and also because this was financially more feasible. Each envelope forwarded to the employee included the employee survey with its own covering letter, and a brief covering note from the organisation, expressing the organisation's interest in participating in the study. A return envelope, with the researcher's name, but with the address of the contact person's department in the organisation, was also enclosed with each questionnaire. Envelopes were clearly marked 'Confidential'. Reminders were forwarded on company letterhead, approximately ten days after the survey was dispatched.

Distribution and completion was carried out during June-July 1999, and 243 completed questionnaires were received, making a response rate of 49 percent.

Since the distribution was carried out by the organisation, it is not possible to analyse whether the achieved sample is a true reflection of the targeted sample. This compromise needed to be made because of dependence on the company, and company desire for confidentiality of its employees. The representation of sub-groups in the

achieved sample was discussed with the Corporate Personnel Consultant. In her informed opinion, there was no obvious misrepresentation.

Company B – Pilot testing, Timetable, Sampling, Distribution and Collection:

Fieldwork in Company B started in September 1999. The questionnaire was tested on the project sponsor in the company and three other staff. Minor refinements were made to customise the questionnaire.

Although the same tools were used for data collection in the two organisations, the timetable, sampling, distribution and collection was different.

Data collection started in Company B with distribution of the Employee Survey to 225 employees working at the head office at one work-site. It was obvious from the beginning that this company was only interested in carrying out the survey at one large work-site, rather than the whole organisation. This had 450 head-office employees and nearly the same number of manufacturing employees. However, later it became apparent that they were really only interested in surveying the head-office staff, since they planned to expand their use of flexible working only in this area, and could not afford to raise false expectations among manufacturing employees. Thus, limited access was granted. Since the total population of head-office staff was only 450, every second employee was selected from the employee database (arranged on the basis of hierarchy).

The distribution was carried out by the company, as they were not prepared to disclose a list of their employees, and also because it was financially more feasible. However, the collection was through stamped-addressed-envelopes (SAE), returnable to City University Business School. A few days before questionnaires were distributed, an e-mail went out to all head-office employees stating that the organisation was participating in an external study, that it was vital that if their name had been randomly selected they should complete the questionnaire, and that the outcome would be beneficial for the Company. Also, after distribution of the survey, a brief note was put on top of the screen-saver for almost two weeks to remind individuals to reply to the survey. Reminder letters were forwarded after two weeks, extending the return date.

The distribution and return was carried out during September to November 1999. 128 completed questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 57 percent.

As in Company A, while analysis has not been carried out to establish whether the achieved sample is a true reflection of the targeted sample because of the limitation imposed by in-company research, the achieved sample was discussed with the HR Operations Manager. In her informed opinion, the sub-groups were representative of the actual distribution of employees at the work-site.

Interviews were carried out with three senior staff members:

1. HR Operations Manager
2. Project Manager – Manufacturing Technology Division
3. Project Leader - Software Development Unit

There is no active union in the head-office, and hence the union perspective could not be covered. In addition to the original interview questions, Employee Survey results were also briefly discussed with the managers.

4.5 APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

Empirical research was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. While some of the research questions were addressed by either of the two methods, overlapping questions provided greater insight into other areas. This section elaborates the approach to data analysis.

The process of data analysis started with the survey. This data was analysed using SPSS. The data matrix was examined and explored through summarising percentages, frequencies, mean values, range, correlations, histograms and scatter plots.

A large part of the analysis involved finding differences in the responses of sub-groups. Since the dependent and independent variables differed from nominal to interval, three different procedures have been used to find differences between sub-groups.

1. **Cross-tabulations** to find differences in response to nominal variables. Pearson's chi-square values were used with the cross-tabulation procedure, and Cramer's V is reported. Any cross-tabulation results where the cells with expected frequency of less than five were greater than 20 percent were not considered.
2. **T-Tests** to test equality of two means for variables measured on an interval or ratio scale. The t-value is reported.
3. **Analysis of variance** (ANOVA) to test equality of means for variables measured on interval or ratio scale when comparison was required between more than two mean values. The F-ratio is reported. (Bonferroni test results were used with ANOVA to determine which means were significantly different from each other).

Mean values of the significant results were studied to find out which sub-groups had scored high or low. The minimum confidence interval for all procedures is 95 percent.

In the initial analysis, differences were explored on the basis of a number of variables. The key variables were gender, age, childcare responsibility, household status, education, income and occupational groups. These variables are divided into two groups – the demographic or personal variables (gender, childcare responsibilities, household status), and work-related characteristics (education, income and occupational groups) which define status and negotiating power.

Length of service, working hours, previous experiences of unemployment and redundancy, self-reported experiences of increase or decrease in stress, workload and responsibilities were used to understand differences in the response to selected core questions.

Some of the independent variables were not used to analyze difference in responses. This was either because of extremely disproportionate representation in sub-groups (e.g. ethnicity was not used because over 96 percent of the sample in both organisations was white), or because the desired data analysis altered when the focus shifted towards case-studies. Some variables were used to create new variables – e.g. childcare, marital status and whether an individual's spouse or partner was working were used to create the variable of household status.

The zero-order analysis was explored further by introducing statistical controls. Gender, childcare responsibilities and occupational groups (particularly the managerial group) were most frequently used as control variables, as initial analysis and desk research supported the idea of interaction on the basis of these variables. Statistical controls aimed to detect spurious relations, intervening variables and statistical interaction or specification. Zero-order correlations were also explored further through calculating partial correlations.

The statistical analysis was complemented by comments made by the respondents. The questionnaire design allowed remarks at several points, and also invited any further comments at the end of the questionnaire. Employee comments were found useful to highlight or explain some issues already evident through the statistics, while at other times these provided voice to the minority sub-groups or individuals who were different to their group-norms.

Large parts of the managerial interviews were typed under appropriate sub-heading for each company. This allowed comparison of the opinions of managers on the main topic areas. Where the issues discussed in managerial interviews overlapped with the survey, cross-comparison was used to understand the rationale behind the relationships revealed in the quantitative data. Managerial comments are discussed at appropriate times in the data analysis chapters (Chapter 5-8). Selected survey data was also directly discussed with the interviewees to strengthen findings, or to explain them.

Findings from the two companies were compared for similarities and differences. This comparison provided greater insight into the research objectives.

Thus, the project has used the interaction of statistics with the more narrative comments, using the systematic statistical data to create foundations and the anecdotal data to provide rich description or to explain the hard data. Through this approach, the required answers or elaboration could be the result of survey analysis, or may emerge from the interview data. Alternatively, explanations, answers, new insights or theory may emerge when data from multiple sources was combined. The results should be viewed in light of the method(s) of analysis used.

Data in the following chapters (Chapter 5-9) is presented under the sub-headings which they addressed. For each organisation, the quantitative data is discussed first. The key research areas towards which the data being discussed contributes are discussed at the introduction of each section in the chapters to follow.

4.6 LIMITATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

This section describes areas where the research tools were weak in generating the desired data, and comments on the reasons for this. Corresponding adjustments to planned analysis of the data, and its reflection on research results are discussed. Further limitations of the analysis are discussed. Some changes in the UK since the beginning of the research process, and how they have been accommodated in the thesis are also highlighted.

The employee survey: The problems faced in gaining access to organisations have already been discussed. Thus, the number of organisations studied were less than initially desired, as a result of which some questions from the employee survey did not produce the desired data or the originally planned analysis could not be carried out. In the original research design, some of the questions were to be analysed after forming a collective database from all the organisations studied. The number in this total sample would have been much higher than the $n=371$ by combining samples of Company A ($n=243$) and Company B ($n=128$) only. Thus a combined database was not formed, and some independent variables were not used (e.g. number of children and age of the youngest child). A few core questions could not be analysed to their full potential. An example of this would be the results from the question:

D-4: If your organisation is not ready to facilitate you in achieving work-life balance, which of the options given below would you choose?

Please tick one only

- Do nothing about it ☐
- Start looking for another job ☐
- Leave for another similar job (but better work-life benefits) ☐
- Leave for a job for which you are over-qualified but which has flexible working options ☐
- Become self-employed ☐
- Leave work/ paid work ☐
- Others (please tick and specify) ☐

A larger cross-organisational database would have allowed analysis of each sub-category of response to find out if personal and work-related characteristics made people react in a particular manner. Similar, more in-depth analysis, with generalisable results, could have been carried out on other questions (e.g. B-5, B-6, C-1, C-2).

In general, Section B either could not provide the desired data, or this data could not be analysed to its full potential, because of the sample size. For B-2, there was little or no representation of temporary or self-employed individuals in the samples. Their opinion, especially on questions in sections of ‘*Working contract*’ (Section B) and ‘*Future of work*’ (Section D) could have widened the debate. Further, the employee-employer choice in type of contract was considered less relevant for permanent/open-ended contracts, since these are the norm. As there were a considerable number of multiple responses to this question, and exploratory analysis showed no patterns on the basis of demographics and work-related characteristics, it was decided not to use this data. Similarly, the problem of multiple responses existed for B-3, where some individuals indicated that their working patterns were a result of mutual agreement and either their own or the employer’s choice. This reduced reliability of data from these questions.

B-4 was to be used for the in-depth analysis of B-5 and B-6, which was not carried out when the number of case studies decreased. Alternative analysis was carried out on the data of B-5 and B-6, but this was argued to be methodologically less reliable, and is not included in the thesis. Hence the project does not engage in arguments on the role of self-employment and temporary work to improve work-life balance, as was initially anticipated.

Despite pilot testing, analysis revealed some weaknesses in the questionnaire design. Item seven of C-5 was a 'double-barrelled' question. This has not been analysed. Also, the data gathered by C-1 and C-2 would have been more robust if each of these questions was divided into two separate questions. For C-1, the first three columns would form one question and the last two columns a separate question. For C-2, the division would be the first two and the last two columns. This would enable the researcher to explore differences between desire, and non-desire more confidently.

The survey analysis: As Section 4.5 explains, the data has been analysed using cross-tabulations, t-test, ANOVA and correlations, with some selected controls. It is accepted that the choice of method of analysis may vary with researchers. Some may argue against the use of t-tests and ANOVA with Likert scales, while others may argue that this data could have supported more complex multivariate statistical analysis. The statistical results discussed should be viewed in light of the methods of analysis. Some interactions may have been overlooked, although logical controls were introduced.

Nevertheless, statistics alone do not provide the results of this study. Even in the survey data, statistical analysis is complemented by comments made by the respondents. Some patterns emerging from the survey data were discussed and confirmed through managerial interviews. Other results are based on the comparison of employee and employer data. These techniques should strengthen the findings.

The limitations imposed by the choice of methodology and its strengths and weaknesses have been discussed in Section 4.1.1.

The organisational questionnaire: The completed organisational questionnaires were helpful in initiating discussion on flexible working policies in each organisation in the

interviews. However, they did not generate any other useful data. In Company A, where the questionnaire was forwarded to five managers, the information they provided varied considerably between respondents. For example, the questionnaire covered use and availability of flexibility in the organisation. In the interviews, it emerged that each respondent had answered certain questions with reference to their own business units in mind, while other parts had been answered for the whole organisation. Also, it was ambiguous whether the use of certain forms of flexibility was formal, informal or was only being pilot tested. A policy could be formal in one part of the organisation and being pilot tested in another part. Perhaps differences in the answers of respondents did not reflect anything other than the complexity of organisations, and the difficulties in carrying out organisational research.

However, because of the possible flaws in the data gathered by the organisational questionnaire in Company A, this data was not used as a framework for comparison between organisations, or for comparison between business units. It was only forwarded to one senior HR manager in Company B, and her response was used to initiate discussions with all interviewees in Company B. Since only two companies were studied, and they were at different stages in offering work-life policies, a precise comparison of policies offered in the organisations became less important. As noted, however, the details covered in the questionnaire were especially helpful in triggering management's thinking on concepts surrounding negotiating power (e.g. why were there differences in offering policies between occupational groups).

The process of research: The process of fieldwork has been described in Section 4.4. As discussed, the initial research design included more case-studies, with the intention of combining statistical analysis to understand associations between personal and work-related characteristics and desire for (internal and external) flexibility and work-life balance. The managerial interviews were designed to understand differences between organisations, and to understand power.

As access could be gained to two organisations, the approach to analysis was slightly altered. The data from different companies was not combined, but each case-company was studied in more detail, which certainly provided more information on the topic of negotiating power than was initially anticipated. Power has been a central idea in this

research project since the end of the first round of the literature review which resulted in the design of the research framework (Figure 3.1). However, with two organisations, it became the primary focus. Thus, the limitations imposed by the number of organisations resulted in minor deviations from the original research path, but effort was made to make the best of the situation. The result was a clear focus on within-company attitudes and behaviour.

Developments since the beginning of the project: After the fieldwork for this project was designed (1997–1998), two main national surveys have covered questions on various types of flexible working options. These are the WERS 1998 (Cully et al, 1999) and the DfEE Work-life Balance 2000 baseline study (Hogarth et al, 2001). Parts of this project's survey where the questions overlapped have been discussed in the concluding chapter (Chapter 9 and 10) to improve generalisability of results, and to increase confidence in this project's findings. These national surveys (Cully et al, 1999; Hogarth et al, 2001) have not been reviewed in the desk research chapters (Chapter 2 and 3), since this data was not available at the time of research design.

There have been considerable developments in the work-life context in the UK during the time period of this research (1997-2002). The thesis should be read keeping in mind that the survey was designed and administered in 1998, before the Employment Relations Act 1999 made parental leave a part of the legislation, among other rights for parents such as time off for emergencies. The right to return to part-time work following maternity leave, and the Work and Parents Taskforce's recommendations of parental right to flexible working were not in place (DTI, 2001). The statutory maternity leave was 14 weeks.

Other noteworthy developments during the research include the green paper, Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice (DTI, 2000), the DfEE (2000) report, the setting up of the National Work-Life Forum and the Work-Life Challenge Fund. It was not found appropriate to review these changes in the desk research chapters. They have been discussed in the concluding chapters.

Since the aim of the project was to debate possibilities for the long-term development of work-life policies, additional theoretical approaches are also discussed in the

concluding chapters. While empirical data led to some of these theories, others emerged from the work of scholars who used these to theorise results similar to this project during the time period of the research. Findings of these scholars are discussed in the concluding chapters.

4.7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has discussed the research strategy, the research tools, the process of fieldwork, and the limitations and weaknesses of the data and the methodology. The following chapters discuss results from the fieldwork in the two organisations. Chapter 5 discusses survey results from Company A, to understand employee attitudes towards flexibility, and to distinguish between employee groups, on the basis of personal and work-related characteristics (in their desire for work-life balance). Chapter 6 presents findings from management interviews in Company A, although it draws on the employee survey as well. This chapter focuses on the negotiating power between the employee and the employer. Results from Company B are presented in the same fashion in Chapter 7 and 8. Results from the two companies are then compared and contrasted in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE GROUPS IN COMPANY A

This chapter presents the findings for Company A from a questionnaire administered to 500 employees. This covered five issues:

1. Employee attitudes towards flexible working
2. How different groups perceive flexible working options
3. Sources of work-family conflict
4. The perceived benefits of flexible working among those currently making use of it
5. Factors likely to influence the negotiating power of employees

Having discussed these findings, and specific points of agreement or conflict with other researchers and assumptions underpinning this study, we then discuss in Chapter 6 the broader implications relating to our key hypothesis, about the negotiating power between the employee and the employer, to understand how long-term change in work-life policies can be brought about.

5.1 THE ORGANISATION

Company A is a financial services organisation, and has nearly 13,000 employees, 3,500 of whom are employed in non-retail, the remaining in the retail area. The survey was sent to 500 employees, divided equally between retail and non-retail. The 250 retail employees were selected from four geographical locations – two in the north of England and two in the south. Fifty employees were selected from customer services (a call centre). From the non-retail, the 250 employees were selected from the three main functions, IT, marketing and insurance. 243 completed questionnaires were received, making a response rate of 49 percent.

Work-life balance of employees, flexible working and family friendly practices were considered important by the management of Company A, and part of the image the company wanted to create. The Trade Union in the organisation was strong and well

established, with a friendly relationship with management, and the people who ran the union were ex-employees or on secondment.

5.2 THE SAMPLE

The following is a brief description of the principal sample characteristics in the analysis:

The sample divided one-third male to two-thirds female. The age distribution was unexceptional being spread as follows:

	<u>%</u>
≤ 20	4
21-30	36
31-40	35
41-50	20
51-60	5
	<u>100</u>

Forty-nine percent of the sample had children, while three percent were also responsible for elderly dependants at home. The full-picture of marital status (with and without children) was as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Single (without children)	27
Single (with children)	4
Traditional family (without children)	1
Traditional family (with children)	4
Dual career couples (without children)	23
Dual career couples (with children)	41
	<u>100</u>

The occupational groups present in the sample were as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Managers and senior administrators	26
Professionals	6
Associate professionals and Technicians	20
Sales/Services	5
Clerical and Secretarial	40
Others	3
	<u>100</u>

This was reflected in salary as follows:

	<u>%</u>
more than £40,000	7
£30,000 - £40,000	13
£20,000 - £30,000	18
£10,000 - £20,000	42
less than £10,000	20
	<u>100</u>

And in educational background as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Degree/Postgraduate degree/equivalent prof. qualifications	24
A level or equivalent/HND or NVQ 4	26
O level or equivalent/GCSE (grades A-C)/BTEC/NVQ level 3	39
No qualifications/CSE or equivalent/GCSE (grades D-G)	9
Others	2
	<u>100</u>

The sample characteristics had some noteworthy associations. Men were more likely to be higher educated ($\chi^2=0.3709^{***}$) and in the higher income brackets ($\chi^2=0.5728^{***}$). Associations existed between gender and occupational groups ($\chi^2=0.5728^{***}$). Although the managerial group had balanced representation of men and women, nearly two-thirds of the professional and associate professionals were male, and majority of the secretarial staff was female.

Income, education and occupational groups were associated. The association for income and education was $v=0.2564^{***}$, for occupational groups and education was $v=0.2946^{***}$, and for occupational groups and income was $v=0.3815^{***}$. Managers and professionals were more likely to be higher educated, and managers were the highest earners.

No associations were found between gender and age, and gender and childcare responsibilities. As expected, childcare responsibility was associated with age ($v=0.5289^{***}$), with those in the 31-50 age groups most likely to have dependant children.

In summary, the sample shows a distribution around two themes – (i) family responsibilities and possible lifestyle influences (e.g. age), and (ii) differences in status (education, pay and employment level), which may affect the power of employees to influence aspects of working life, such as hours worked or type of contract.

5.3 STATISTICAL PROCEDURES FOR THE ANALYSIS

The data from the survey was analysed using SPSS. The results discussed show percentages, frequencies, mean values and correlations. A large part of the analysis involved finding differences in the responses of sub-groups. Since the dependent and independent variables differed from nominal to interval, three different procedures have been used to find differences between sub-groups – crosstabulation, t-tests and ANOVA. Statistical controls have been applied to understand relationships further. Details of the analysis and its limitations have been discussed in Section 4.5 and Section 4.6.

The minimum confidence interval for all procedures is 95 percent. A star rating system has been used to indicate confidence intervals – one star (*) means less than or equal to 0.05, two stars (**) mean less than or equal to 0.01, and three stars (***) mean less than or equal to 0.001.

5.4 EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORKING

This section reports the findings on employee attitudes towards flexible working. This question lies at the heart of the study, since it is assumed one of the principal drivers for the adoption by companies of more varied and extreme options for flexible working is employees' own desire for flexible working.

A strong positive response favouring flexible working in general would indicate increased pressure for companies to adopt flexible working. However, a degree of negative employee response is also important, particularly if it indicates a polarising of employee attitudes among different sub-groups. This would have the effect of weakening the overall impact of employees' 'negotiating power', though a multiplicity of competing demands (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). 'Multiplicity of demand' means the management confronts incompatible and competing demands that makes unilateral conformity difficult, because the satisfaction of one group often requires the organisation to ignore or defy the demands of another.

In studying differences between groups, pressure to provide flexible working options will also increase in the future if a higher positive response to one of the statements, *'flexible working can help me balance my work and family life'*, comes from the new components of the changing demographics or from sub-groups with higher intra-organisational negotiating power.

Do employees therefore agree with the statement *'flexible working options can help me balance my work and personal life'*. The results (Figure 5.1) show that employees consider flexible working to be a useful work-life policy, with 77 percent agreeing moderately or strongly with this statement.

This positive opinion is also reflected in employee response to three additional statements, shown in Table 5.1, which ask about general employee attitudes towards flexibility as a means to facilitate better balance between work and life. Three-quarters or more of employees replied positively to all these statements, with the majority strongly agreeing.

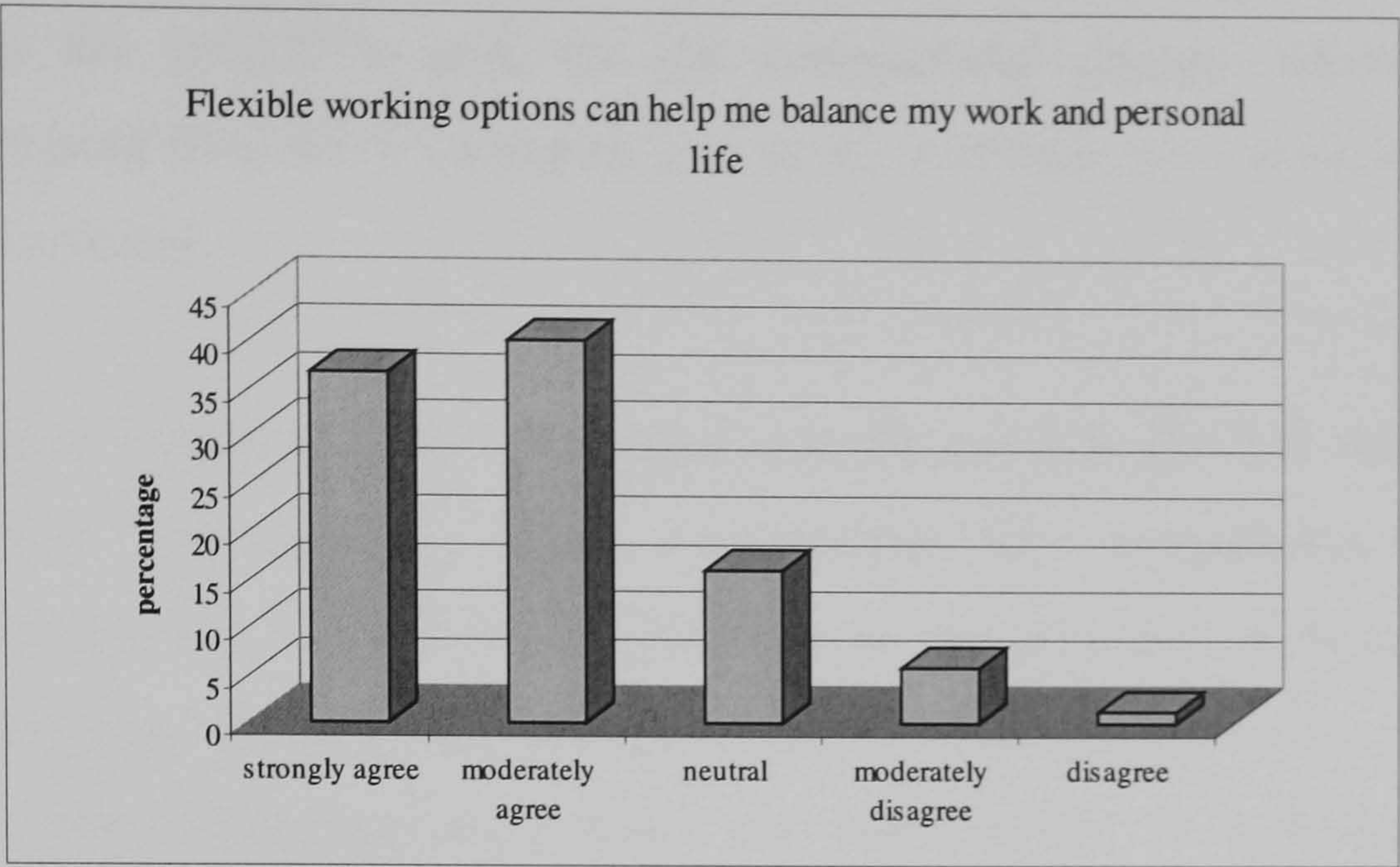


Figure 5.1: ‘Flexible working can help me balance my work and personal life’.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Flexible working options are a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities	49	37	10	2	2
Flexible working options should be made available to all employees in the organisation	55	25	13	4	4
Family-friendly policies should be expanded to make them employee-friendly policies	35	39	23	3	-

Table 5.1: Flexible working and family friendly policies (%)

The response to these questions may be positively biased (see Section 4.4.1). Nevertheless, the strong response to the questions covered indicates the probability of increased demand for flexible working practices in the future. Moreover, negative response to these statements, which is also extremely important, is small. Further analysis to find significant differences between sub-groups gave no results. Thus, the possibility of competing attitudes among employee sub-groups is minimal, increasing the negotiating power of the employees. If certain employee sub-groups approach the management with requests for higher flexibility, therefore, there is a high probability that their demands will not be contradicted by other employees in the organisation.

While the three statements in Table 5.1 did not produce any significant differences between sub-groups, analysis of the statement ‘flexible working can help me balance

my work and personal life' led to two interesting findings. Females were significantly more likely to agree that flexible working options could help them balance their work and personal life ($t=2.27^*$), and, for the occupational groups, where significant differences existed ($F=2.86^*$), managers and senior administrators were least likely to find flexibility useful.

Further analysis shows that the managerial attitude towards flexible working is not reflected across both genders. When the analysis for occupational groups was controlled for gender, it showed no difference in the attitudes of females, but the difference continued to exist for males ($F=2.88^*$). Two inferences are derived from this. Firstly, since organisational policies are implemented through managers, this attitude of managers can, and in fact does, have an adverse effect on the use of flexible working as a work-life policy, and this comes across in the management interviews covered in Chapter 6. Secondly, as approximately half the managers in this organisation are females, this can be one of the reasons that the organisation is at the forefront of offering flexible working, and thus increasing representation of women-managers in the workforce may increase the use of employee-friendly flexible working.

However, a point to be kept in perspective during this discussion is the seniority of male and female managers. While the survey grouped all the managers together, income can be taken as an indicator of the seniority of managers. Male managers were significantly higher paid ($v=0.6488^{***}$). While men earned more than women in the total sample, the difference in gender income was greatest in the managerial group. Thus, most of the senior managerial posts are likely to be filled by men.

The original relationship between females and a higher desire for flexible working is also because of the difference in the attitude of managerial employees. That is, when the analysis for gender was controlled for occupational groups, difference existed only between male and female managers ($t=2.33^*$). Thus, the relationship between gender and higher desire for flexibility is specific to the managerial employees, and no differences existed for all non-managerial sub-groups.

Additional analysis introducing statistical controls did not provide any results. Contradicting the initial line of thinking, childcare responsibilities did not yield any

results as an independent variable, or as a control variable to understand the difference in attitudes of females employees. Similarly, employee opinion did not vary on the basis of age or household status. Thus, younger employees (Generation X) did not have a stronger desire for flexible working, and dual career couples were not more likely to find flexibility helpful than individuals belonging to traditional families. Thus, the argument that the desire for flexibility will increase in the future because of a greater desire for flexibility by the younger age-group, or because of an increase in the proportion of dual-career couples in the workforce, were not supported. Similarly, no differences were found on the basis of income and education. Thus, evidence from this question suggests that the route to expansion of flexible working is not the desire of specific employee groups but of a majority of the employees, irrespective of their personal or work-related characteristics.

Overall, although only limited evidence was found linking the new demographic sub-groups to a higher desire for flexibility, this finding is overshadowed by unmistakable support in favour of flexible working policies from all employees. However, the attitude of male managers differs, and needs to be explored further. No evidence was found pointing towards ‘multiplicity of demand’. Thus the organisation may expand its use of flexible working in the future because of its perceived attraction to all employees, or, if it is requested by particular sub-groups, their demands are not likely to be contradicted by other employees in the organisation.

5.5 HOW DIFFERENT GROUPS PERCEIVE FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

Thus far it has been shown that there is a high desire for flexibility among employees. But what kind of flexibility is desired, and by which employee groups? This section aims to answer these questions.

Three aspects surrounding flexible working practices were explored – availability, use, and desirability. ‘Availability’ refers to the perceived existence of organisational policies (response may be influenced by employee knowledge), while ‘use’ reflects individuals’ response to organisational policies; ‘desirability’ indicates whether employees would like to have the option. The flexible working practices studied fall into two categories:

- (i) **flexible work options** (flexi-time, compressed work-weeks, home-working, part-time working, term-time working, job-sharing, voluntarily reduced time), and
- (ii) **extended leave options** (maternity, paternity, sabbaticals and career breaks).

The aim is to uncover the desirability of particular options, and to understand any difference in desirability between groups based on personal and work-related characteristics. Group-differences in use and availability can also provide information on negotiating power. The responses of the newer components of workforce were also analysed – that is, groups whose proportion in the workforce is increasing – namely, women, women with young children, and dual career couples. While it was also the intention to include lone parents, and those with elderly dependant care responsibilities among the newer components of the workforce, this was not possible due to the sample size, and the small representation of these groups in the sample.

5.5.1 Flexible work options

Table 5.2¹ provides details of use, availability and desirability of flexible work options in Company A. As the Table shows, at least one form of flexibility was perceived to be available to 70 percent of the respondents, and 55 percent were using one or more of these options. However, only flexi-time (39 percent) and part-time working (18 percent) were used widely. Desirability, the last column, shows the percentage of respondents (calculated on the denominator of the whole sample) who were neither using that form of flexibility, nor was it available to them, but who would like the option to be available. The percentages reported in this column indicate a large, unfulfilled demand among employees. Company policies and what employees desired differed most widely in relation to flexi-time, compressed work weeks, and home-working. It should be noted that all these provide flexibility within a full-time working contract, and do not involve any time-income trade-off.

¹ This table is derived from Question C-1, Appendix A. ‘Use’ is Column 1 of C-1, while ‘perceived availability’ is the sum of individual responses in Column 1 and 2 without double counting. Thus ‘use’ is a sub-set of ‘perceived availability’. ‘Desirability’ is primarily Column 4 of C-1. In some instances, there was an overlap between individual responses in Column 4 and Column 1 or Column 2, indicating that the individual was already using that form of flexibility or had it available to them. These cases were subtracted from Column 4, so that desirability now represents an unfulfilled demand.

Nevertheless, the first option that involves such a trade-off – term-time working – is desired by 20 percent of the sample, which is much greater than those currently using it or who perceive it as available to them.

The difference between use and availability (Table 5.2) shows that not all employees will take up a policy if it is made available to them. Conversely, it is not possible for all employees to take up a policy. This may occur if it is not practicable to redesign a job to suit a particular type of flexibility despite earnest efforts, or if the use of flexibility by some of employees makes it impossible to offer the same option to other employees at that specific time. Often cited example of this latter kind is the use of term-time

	Use (%)	Perceived availability (%)	Desirability (%)
Flexi-time	39	44	36
Part-time	18	34	13
Home-working (p/t)	4	10	32
Compressed work weeks	3	7	34
Job-sharing	2	15	13
Term time working	1	7	20
Home-working (f/t)	-	7	24
Voluntary reduced time	-	4	15
Total (excl. double counting)	55	70	73

Table 5.2: Flexible work options
Base: All employees (n=243)

working, which cannot be used by many employees in the same sub-unit of an organisation without adversely effecting business processes and routines. Thus implementation of available flexible working policies requires effort and understanding not only between managers and employees but also among peers themselves.

The overall popularity of an option among employees can be gauged by the sum of use and desirability (Figure 5.2), though the results from this addition may be methodologically less reliable. This sum shows that not surprisingly, flexitime was the most popular option. More revealing was the popularity of compressed work weeks, and the ability to distribute working time between home and office.

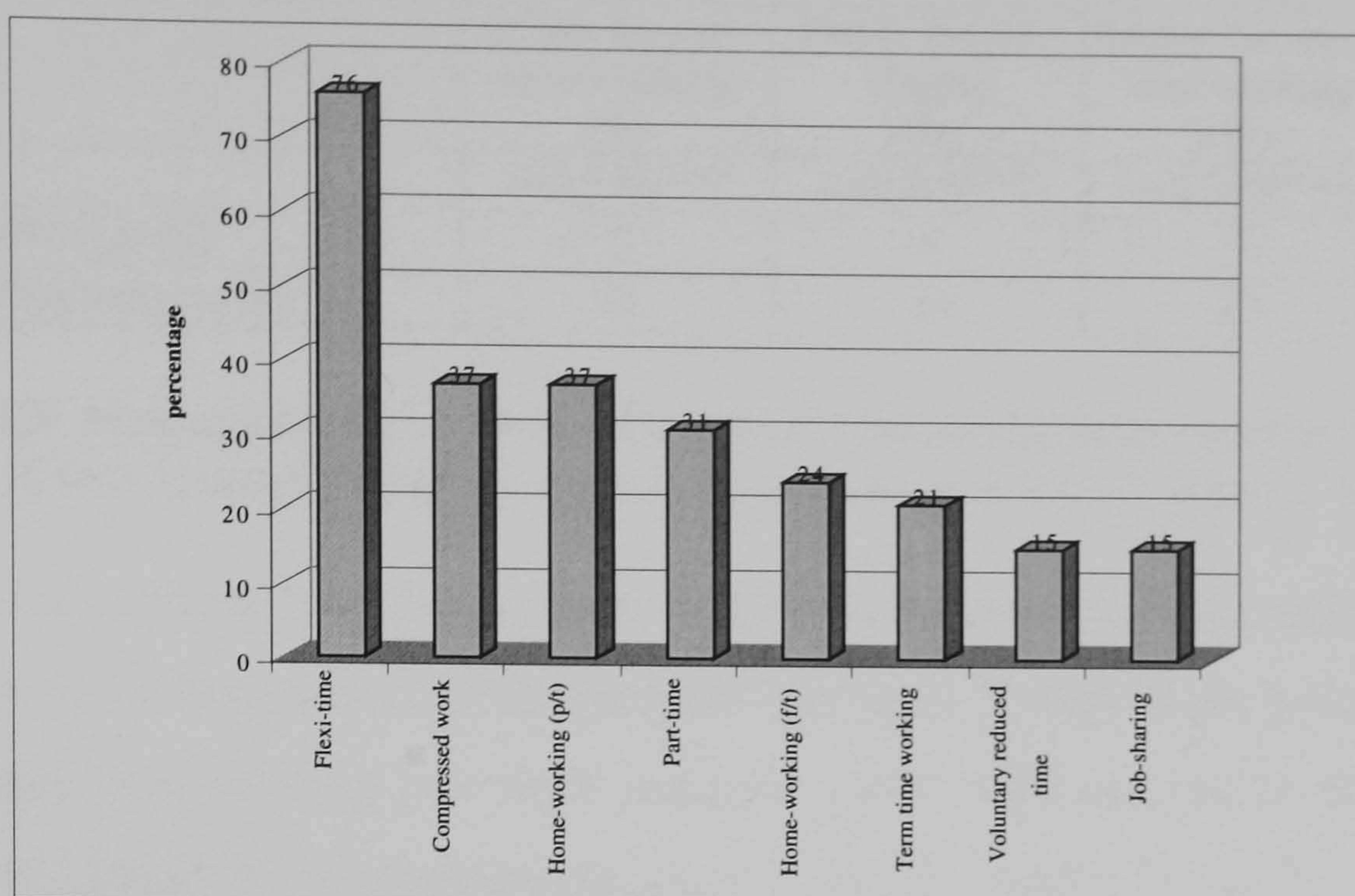


Figure 5.2: Popularity of flexible working options

Differences between sub-groups: But which employees desire which kind of flexibility, and do they have the power to put pressure on the organisation to provide it. This sub-section reports findings on association between desirability of or lack of interest in flexible work options and gender, age, childcare responsibilities, household status, education level, occupational groups and income levels. While it was the aim to analyse differences in sub-groups in use and perceived availability as well, this analysis could only be carried out for flexitime and part-time working, since they were the only options used by and available to a reasonable proportion of individuals.

In reporting findings in this section, reduced time flexibility options are combined since their analysis showed similar results. Not surprisingly, women were more likely to show greater interest in options that involve a time-income trade-off. This interest is reflected in the higher use of part-time work by women ($v=0.3289^{***}$), and by a greater desire for part-time working, job-sharing and term-time working (Table 5.3).

	Desire for part-time working (%)	Desire for job-sharing (%)	Desire for term-time working (%)
	$v=0.4706^{***}$	$v=0.2856^{***}$	$v=0.2102^{***}$
Men (n=87)	5	0	9
Women (n=156)	51	20	27

Table 5.3: Men and women’s desire for options involving time-income trade-offs
(Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V)

Differences also existed in the use and desirability of time-income trade-off options when analysed on the basis of childcare responsibilities. Twenty eight percent of those with children were working part-time, compared with eight percent of those without children ($v=0.2623^{***}$). Controlling for gender, the association between childcare and part-time working was specific to females ($v=0.4242^{***}$). However, 24 percent of those without children (33 percent if only females are considered) desired part-time working, suggesting that part-time work may be attractive for reasons other than childcare.

Those with children also showed a greater desire for term-time working ($v=0.2335^{***}$), with interest particularly strong (as one would expect) among those with children in the 0-5 years age-group ($v=0.3638^{***}$). The fact that term-time working was more popular among part-time workers than full-time ones ($v=0.1754^{**}$) reflects an obvious correlation of women with responsibility for younger children. Since the representation of women in the workforce, and women with younger children, is on the increase, and they are likely to be a permanent feature of the workforce, the desire for options that involve a time-income trade-off is likely to increase.

When controlled for gender, the association between childcare and term time working was repeated for females ($v=0.2967^{***}$). For men, although the numbers are small for a statistically significant result, seven of the eight men who desired term-time working had children. Term-time working was also the most popular reduced time option among men – six of the eight men who showed interest in term-time working being dual career fathers, and one a single parent. Men from ‘traditional families’, with one breadwinner, on the other hand, are more constrained in their ability to take up time-income trade-off options:

Because I am the sole earner in the family, I cannot afford to offset earnings against flexible working. My wife has to be at home in order to be there when my son returns from school. However, if my wife is freed up to work, and we could both have flexible working conditions, then we could afford to offset earning against flexible working hours. (41-50 years old male, Associate professional/technician)

Thus, an increase in dual career families and in lone parents may increase the desire of men for these options as well. However, no statistical differences were found in this study on the basis of household status. Also, no differences were found between different age-groups.

Analysis on the basis of educational level, occupational group, and annual income produced many significant differences (Table 5.4). It should be recalled that these characteristics are associated (Section 5.2). Overall, those with higher negotiating power (i.e. the higher educated, managerial and professional respondents, and those on higher income), were less likely to desire flexible working options that involve time-income trade-offs.

The differences in Table 5.4, however, raise more questions than answers. While those with lower educational qualifications were high users of part-time working, those with higher qualifications thought that this option was not available to them (column 2). In fact, the more qualified an individual, the less likely s/he was to think that part-time working was available to them. However, the policies of Company A do not differentiate between employees in offering part-time working. Thus, the difference in employee knowledge, through their perceptions of availability, highlights how the use of a policy reinforces perceptions of its availability. Since high-status employees were less likely to use part-time working, it was perceived to be not available.

More highly educated respondents were also less likely to be interested in part-time working (column 3) and job-sharing (column 5). This suggests a greater investment in working life through education may increase the desirability of and commitment to pursuing a career on a full-time basis. If the educational profile of the workforce rises,

	Part-time working			Job-sharing		Term-time working
	Working part-time (1)	Perceive part-time work as not available (2)	Not-interested in part-time working (3)	Would like to job-share (4)	Not interested in job-sharing (5)	
No. of individuals who selected the option	44	69	87	31	121	115
No. of males: no. of females	1:43	36:33	50:37	0:31	63:58	47:68
Education						
Degree, professional qualifications	10%	39%	49%		64%	
A level or equivalent, HND, NVQ 4	10	32	49		67	
O-levels, GCSE (A-C), BTEC, NVQ 3	26	25	22		34	
CSE, GCSE (D-G), None	32	9	23		36	
	v=0.2293**	v=0.1996*	v=0.2808***	N.S.	v=0.31455***	N.S.
Occupational groups						
Managers and senior administrators	2%	44%	58%	18%	61%	66%
Professionals	13	40	47	0	60	40
Associate professional and technical	12	31	41	2	59	45
Sales and services	39	8	31	0	39	39
Clerical and secretarial	32	17	17	19	37	37
	v=0.3404***	v=0.2717**	v=0.3568***	v=0.2424**	v=0.2327**	v=0.2429**
Annual income						
more than £40,000	/	59%	82%	0	77%	59%
£30,000 - £40,000		33	60	0	83	77
£20,000 - £30,000		39	46	9	55	52
£10,000 - £20,000		28	31	23	41	45
less than £10,000		6	6	8	35	27
		v=0.3049***	v=0.4313***	v=0.2655**	v=0.3292***	v=0.2902***

Table 5.4: Differences in response to reduced hours working options
(Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V; non significant differences [N.S.] not shown)

therefore, the demand for part-time working and other forms like job-sharing may not increase as expected with the influx of working women and mothers of young children into the workforce. On the other hand, the acceptability of part-time working may reduce the (perceived) adverse impact of part-time working on long term career progression, and make it more attractive even for the higher educated. Another explanation is that because reduced time working has been used in low-status jobs for a long time period, but not in high-status jobs, these employees face psychological barriers accepting that their jobs can be performed on a reduced hours basis. These ideological hindrances may gradually decrease.

Among occupational groups, managers and professional were less likely to be interested in reducing their working time. Even so, 18 percent of managers showed an interest in job-sharing (column 4). The desires of these managers should not be ignored, as one exasperated female manager commented:

There should be more opportunity of job-sharing and part-time positions in a managerial role. I have built up skills/knowledge and experience to do the job effectively. (31-40 years old female manager, working 40 hours per week, with two children in the 0-5 years age category)

The findings for Table 5.4 were explored further for difference between genders. All but one individual working part-time (column 1) and all those desiring to job-share (column 4) were women. Thus, the results from these columns are a reflection of the attitude of women.

Where analysis permitted², findings from Column 3, 5 and 6, which indicate lack of interest in part-time, job-share, and term-time working, were largely replicated across genders. Thus, association between status and reduced-time working existed for both genders. The relationship between perceived non-availability of part-time working

² Controlling for gender reduced sample size, and because each independent variable had 4-5 categories, almost half the cross-tabulations gave results where the minimum frequency requirement, of cells with expected frequency of less than five being less than 20 percent, was not met. The pattern of percentages was observed in the procedures which did not confirm to the statistical requirements, and the normal process, of observing Cramer's V, significance level, and cell percentages, was followed for the remaining procedures.

(column 2) and status was specific to females. That is, when the analysis was repeated for females, occupational groups ($v=0.3391^{**}$) and income levels ($v=0.2811^{**}$) were found to influence employee perception of non-availability of policies. This difference does not exist for males. Thus, it is speculated that because of the lesser use of part-time working in high-status jobs, perceptions of non-availability were created among females. Since men do not use such options, irrespective of their status, perceptions of non-availability are not linked to work-related characteristics. Greater use of reduced time working by highest management ranks, to lead thorough example, can negate such perceptions.

In contrast to time-income trade-offs, a compressed work week (not shown) was more popular among those without children ($v=0.1641^{**}$), the higher educated ($v=0.2048^{*}$), and higher income groups ($v=0.2367^{**}$). Thus, only 18 percent of those earning under £10,000 per annum desired this option, compared with 53 percent earning between £30,000-£40,000 pa. Likewise, the percentage of those interested in compressed work weeks declined from 49% to 38% to 25% to 27%, through the educational scale.

The difference for occupational groups was not statistically significant, but a compressed work week was most popular among professionals, desired by 60 percent, as opposed to 26 percent of clerical and secretarial staff. Thus it can be said that a compressed work week was more popular among sub-groups that are likely to possess higher intra-organisational negotiating power.

The zero-order relationships between the desire for compressed work week and the various independent variables were explored further controlling for gender. Where analysis permitted (see footnote no 2, Chapter 5), these relationships were replicated. Patterns in percentages were replicated across all independent variable. Thus, gender was not found to influence these results.

Flexi-time and home-working showed no significant differences. Voluntary reduced time, likewise, was the only reduced-hours working option in which no significant differences were observed. Desired by 15 percent of respondents, its popularity among all sub-groups is surprising – although as a new concept, perhaps it was not fully understood by the respondents, and results could be different in reality.

Thus, in summary, some full-time flexible working options were universally popular, whereas others (such as compressed work weeks) were more popular among those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power. Reduced hours options were more popular among those with lower intra-organisational power, and among women, particularly those with children.

5.5.2 Extended leave options

Table 5.5 shows the availability and desirability of extended leave options in Company A. The column desirability shows the percentage of individuals who perceive that the option is not available to them, and they desire it. (The percentages of both perceived availability and desirability are calculated on the denominator of the whole sample). Thus career breaks were perceived to be available to fifty-eight percent of the respondents, and when adding in the desirability figures, nearly three-quarters of the workforce either had it or would like to have it. The sum of perceived availability and desirability for sabbaticals was 44 percent. Extended maternity leave (beyond legislative requirements) was available to nearly half the sample.

	Perceived availability (%)	Desirability (%)	Availability + Desirability (%)
Career breaks	58	16	74
Extended maternity leave*	46	17	63
Sabbaticals	22	22	44
Paternity	33	10	43

Table 5.5: Extended leave options (*n=156, only females)
Base: All employee (n=243)

The last column does not of course add up to 100 percent. Not all leave options are desired by every individual, due to differences in lifecycle stages for maternity and paternity leave, but also due to different career aspirations and lifestyle desires for sabbaticals and career breaks. Also, it should be kept in mind that availability does not automatically result in use.

Differences between sub-groups: Responses to perceived availability of extended leave options were analysed for differences between sub-groups. The same procedure was repeated for desirability for extended leave. This subsection reports differences on

the basis of gender, age, childcare responsibilities, household status, educational level, occupational groups and income levels.

Personal characteristics were not found to influence perceived availability of or desirability for leave options. However, initial analysis showed that significant differences existed for paternity leave and career breaks on the basis of education, occupations and income – they were more likely to be available to the higher educated, higher income, managers, professionals and associate professionals (Table 5.6). This leads us to think that the organisation may go a little further to retain the skills of these individuals, which reflects their intra-organisational negotiating power through centrality of roles and difficulty in replaceability. However, ‘availability’ is largely dependent on the knowledge of the worker (as also discussed in Section 5.5.1) and these findings should be viewed critically. Upper hierarchical levels may have greater knowledge of organisational policies.

	Paternity leave	Career break
	Perceive that paternity leave is available	Perceive that career break is available
Education		
Degree, professional qualifications	48%	71%
A level or equivalent, HND, NVQ 4	32	54
O-levels, GCSE (A-C), BTEC , NVQ 3	29	59
CSE, GCSE (D-G), None	18	27
	v=0.1859*	v=0.2347**
Occupational groups		
Managers and senior administrators	39%	60%
Professionals	27	67
Associate professional and technical	51	74
Sales and services	15	23
Clerical and secretarial	24	47
	v=0.2397**	v=0.2590**
Annual income		
more than £40,000	59%	65%
£30,000 - £40,000	63	57
£20,000 - £30,000	32	80
£10,000 - £20,000	28	49
less than £10,000	18	55
	v=0.3094***	v=0.225**

Table 5.6: Differences in availability of extended leave options
(Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V)

To confirm whether such a difference existed, these findings (the zero order relationships) were among those discussed with the Corporate Personnel Consultant, who was the key contact in Company A. She confirmed that most probably difference existed in implementation, not policy. The former was at the discretion of the line managers, who may take more steps to accommodate the needs of employees who are difficult to substitute. This supports the earlier argument that use reinforces perceptions of availability among employees.

Further analysis challenges the robustness of parts of these findings. The zero order relationship between availability of paternity leave and work variables disappears in the analysis done to elaborate this relationship on the basis of gender. The associations between career breaks and the variables disappear for men, but become stronger for women, indicating a specific relationship. Thus, higher educated ($r=0.2928^{**}$), higher income ($r=0.2723^{*}$), managerial, professional and associate professional ($r=0.2715^{***}$) women were more likely to think that career breaks were available to them. This perception of high-status women could be because line managers are more likely to accommodate their needs because of their skills and gender.

No differences were found in the desirability of any extended leave options. While it is possible that such differences do not exist, desirability is the unfulfilled demand, and hence individuals who perceive an option to be available are not in this category. This introduces the bias of individual knowledge into desirability.

5.5.3 Absence of results

The preceding sub-sections have discussed differences between sub-groups on the basis of gender, age, childcare responsibility, household status, education levels, occupational groups and income levels. There were additional items in the questionnaire, which formed sub-groups for analysis, which have been suggested by other studies to have significant influences on the desire for flexibility. These did not provide any significant results in the analysis of questions on flexible work and extended leave options. No relationship was found between increase or decrease in general stress, workload and responsibilities, and desire for any flexible work or

extended leave options. Similarly, experiences of redundancy or unemployment did not form the basis of any significant differences. Thus changes at work were not found to be related to a greater desire for flexibility.

It is possible that these relationships do not exist. However, it is also conceivable that the methodology used and operationalisation of some of these concepts did not allow the relationships to be explored to their full potential. The data is cross-sectional, and the questions on work-related changes were exploring causal relationships. Relying on the respondent's memory, the questionnaire had asked about experiences of unemployment over the last five years, and changes in stress, workload and responsibilities over the same time period. Even if relationships exist between these variables and desire for or use of flexible working, there is no guidance in the literature over how long can their effects last, or, on the other hand, how long does it take for increase in stress or working conditions to influence attitudes.

Also, this study aimed to explore whether a direct relationship existed between perception of increase (or decrease) in general stress, workload and responsibilities, and desire for flexible working options. The theoretical reasoning behind this relationship was that increase in stress and responsibilities can lead to greater work-family conflict, and higher conflict may result in greater desire for flexibility. But a direct relationship was not found. However, these results should be interpreted keeping in mind that it was the respondent's perception of increase in stress, workload and responsibilities which formed the independent variable. Also, the measurement of desirability, and its relationship with use and perceived availability, which introduces the bias of employee knowledge into desirability, should be kept in perspective.

5.5.4 Summary

The key findings on flexible working options are as follows;

- A large majority of employees desire (more) flexibility.
- Flexible working options that allow flexibility within a full-time contract are more popular than options that involve reduction in working time.

- Changing demographics are partially linked to higher use and desire for (more) flexibility, especially those involving time-income trade-offs.
- Individuals with higher intra-organisational negotiating power, and the knowledge workers of tomorrow are more likely to be interested in flexible working options that provide flexibility within a full-time working contract.
- Managers and senior administrators are less likely to desire flexibility.
- Some extended leave options were more likely to be (perceived to be) available to employees with higher intra-organisational negotiating power.
- Changes at work were not found to be linked to a higher desire for flexibility.

All employees desire some form of flexibility, and thus an organisation providing a larger variety of options is more likely to accommodate the needs of more of its employees.

5.6 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

This section analyses the survey questions on work-family conflict. The main aim was to understand if changing demographics or working practices are likely to result in an increase in work-family conflict. A second objective was to establish if this conflict can be reduced by using flexible working practices and creating a lifestyle-friendly working atmosphere in the organisation. Some negative effects of work-family conflict were also explored.

If higher work-family conflict is reported by the newer demographic components of the workforce, and those working longer hours, and experiencing increase in stress, workload and responsibilities, it will indicate that changing demographics and working practices may increase work-family conflict. On the other hand, if those making use of flexible work practices report less work-family conflict, it will tend to justify the use of such practices. Finally, a negative relationship between work-family conflict, and satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation will highlight the adverse impact of neglecting work-life balance of employees.

Although several sources of work-family conflict have been identified, most researchers agree that the general demands of a role, the time devoted to a given role, and the strain produced by a given role are domain elements of work-family conflict. The questionnaire provided statements on each of these dimensions – the first measuring general conflict (that is, employees generalised feelings that conflict existed), the second time-based conflict, and the third strain-based conflict. The results (Table 5.7) show that those who agree or disagree with these statements divide about equal. Highest conflict was reported on the general-conflict scale, where 45 percent moderately or strongly agreed that their work demands interfered with their personal lives.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The demands of my work interfere with my home and personal/family life	14	31	28	16	11
The amount of <i>time</i> my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities	11	20	31	23	15
My job produces <i>strain</i> that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties	9	24	30	22	15

Table 5.7: Work-family conflict (%)

Changing demographics and work-family conflict: There were no significant differences on the basis of demographic groups, childcare responsibilities, age or household status. However, as over one-fifth of the sample consisted of part-time workers, and part-time workers reported significantly lower conflict (as we discuss later), the analysis to find significant differences between sub-groups was rerun for variables covering personal circumstances only for full-time workers, with part-time workers taken temporarily out of the data-set. The only difference found was that full-time workers with younger children were more likely to report higher work-family conflict than full-time workers with older children, on both the general conflict scale ($F=6.5^{***}$) and time-based conflict scale ($F=4.04^{**}$).

Further analysis was carried out by forming comparison groups. Specific comparisons were made between traditional fathers and dual career fathers, fathers and mothers working full-time, and full-time mothers, on the basis of age of the youngest child and number of children. No significant differences were found.

This result is contrary to our initial assumptions and the findings of other researchers. There may be two explanations for this. Firstly, since this particular organisation offered a variety of flexible working options, those who had faced higher conflict may already have taken up these options and hence decreased their conflict. Secondly, the scale used in the current study measures flow of conflict from work to family and not vice-versa. Other researchers have used scales that measure the flow in both directions. It might be that demanding personal circumstances, which form the basis of demographic sub-grouping (e.g. young children at home) are more likely to affect the flow from family to work.

Employees with higher negotiating power and work-family conflict: Additional analysis of work-family conflict statements however showed significant differences between occupational groups on all three scales (Table 5.8). Mean values show that managers and senior administrators experienced the highest work-life conflict on all three scales, with professionals next in reporting time-based and strain-based work-family conflict. Thus, managers faced the highest conflict, and as indicated earlier (Section 5.4.1), were least likely to think that flexible working could help them balance their work and personal lives.

	General conflict	Time-based conflict	Strain-based conflict
	F=6.36***	F=3.714**	F=4.467***
	mean	mean	Mean
Managers and senior administrators	2.21	2.60	2.60
Professionals	2.80	3.00	3.00
Associate prof. and technicians	2.71	3.35	3.42
Sales and services	3.31	3.46	3.31
Clerical and secretarial	3.06	3.24	3.23

Table 5.8: Work-family conflict by occupational groups
(ANOVA results; lower value shows greater conflict; range 1-5; F= F-ratio)

To confirm that the response of managers differed significantly from others, t-tests were carried out between managers and all other individuals grouped together (Table 5.8b). Significant differences existed across all three scales. Repeating this analysis while controlling for gender showed that two of these findings were specific to female managers. The analysis for strain-based conflict was repeated for men and women.

These gender specific findings may be influenced by a high proportion of men in the professional group, which experienced the second highest conflict.

	General conflict	Time-based conflict	Strain-based conflict
Total sample (n=243)	t=4.47***	t=3.86***	t=3.96***
Men (n=87)	1.84	1.44	2.15*
Women (n=156)	4.01***	3.87***	3.16**

Table 5.8b: Work-family conflict for managers vs. non-managers
(t-test results showing t-value)

Since the negative effects of work-family conflict are well researched, organisations should perhaps pay more attention to a better work-life balance for their key managerial and professional employees. Support for female managerial employees should be provided since they are likely to face the highest conflict.

While significant differences existed in the response to work-family conflict questions on the basis of annual income for the total sample, further analysis showed that these statistics only reflected differences on the basis of part-time/full-time contracts. Thus it is concluded that no significant differences were observed on the basis of annual income. Also, there were no differences between the educational groups.

Finally, managers and professionals can also be taken as representing the workforce of the future, as these occupations are predicted to increase (Rajan, 1992; Business Strategies Limited, 1996). The statement on strain-related conflict was included with the specific aim of finding if these ‘knowledge workers’ are more likely to face this type of conflict. The mean values in Table 5.8a support this. Thus, it can be argued that the changing nature of jobs means workers will face greater conflict in the future, and as jobs bring greater responsibility, they will bring greater conflict, especially strain-related conflict. This is a justification for providing more flexibility of the kind desired by these employees, which is compatible with their jobs.

Changes at work and work-family conflict: Anticipated relationships between changes at work and work-family conflict were supported by the analysis. Longer working hours correlated with higher conflict (–0.3462*** for general work-family

conflict, -0.3555*** for time-based conflict, and -0.2888*** for strain based conflict). These relationships are interpreted as indicating the adverse effects of long hours at work on personal/family lives. Problems created by long working hours, and the inability of flexible working to improve work-life balance in these circumstances was highlighted by one overworked male manager.

Flexible working policies are a good idea, and of significant benefit to many people. However, perhaps employers should also look at the other side of the coin. I am contracted to work 35 hours per week, work on average 50 hours per week, and frequently much more. Flexible working would not reduce the amount of work I am expected to do. (31-40 years old, male manager)

In addition to the number of hours worked each week, the questionnaire also asked whether the individual had experienced increase or decrease in general stress, and working hours and responsibilities over the last five years (on a three-point Likert scale). Those who reported an increase in working hours and stress were likely to report higher work-family conflict on all three scales. A weak positive relationship was found between time-based or strain-based conflict, and increase in responsibilities (Table 5.9).

	Increased stress	Increased working hours	Increased responsibilities
General work-family conflict	0.2237***	0.2950***	0.1162
Time based work-family conflict	0.2239***	0.2765***	0.1311*
Strain based work-family conflict	0.2825***	0.2742***	0.1593*

Table 5.9: Correlations between work-family conflict and increase in working hours, stress and responsibility

Thus organisations with a ‘presentism’ or long-hours culture are more likely to disturb the work-life balance of their employees, as do changes at work which result in increases in stress, working hours and responsibility. However, this inference is based on associations found in cross-sectional data, and not derived directly from empirical data which could test causal relationships.

Effects of work-family conflict: The negative effects of work-family conflict are well documented. In this study (based on cross-sectional data), self-reported satisfaction with work, and commitment to the organisation are correlated with work-family conflict statements (Table 5.10).

	Satisfaction with work	Commitment to the organisation
General work-family conflict	-0.3521***	-0.2187***
Time based work-family conflict	-0.4141***	-0.2267***
Strain based work-family conflict	-0.4217***	-0.2997***

Table 5.10: Correlations between conflict, satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation

Flexible working and work-family conflict: Two options were used by a large enough number of respondents to study whether use of flexibility lowered the conflict experienced by employees. These were part-time working (used by 23 percent of respondents), and flexi-time (used by 39 percent of respondents). Significant difference existed between users and non-users, as shown in Table 5.11, and mean values showed that users of these options reported significantly lower conflict than other workers. Thus flexible working appears to be an effective work-life policy.

	Part-time vs. full-time	Flexi-time users vs. non-flexi-time users	Full-time workers using flexi-time vs. full-time workers not using flexi-time
General work-family conflict	2.84**	2.22*	3.09**
Time-based work-family conflict	2.96**	3.43***	4.42***
Strain-based work-family conflict	1.55	3.02**	3.50***

Table 5.11: Differences in work-family conflict of users and non-users of flexible working options
(T-test results showing t-value)

Working atmosphere in the organisation and work-family conflict: In addition to flexible working policies, informal flexibility through a supportive working atmosphere

is also likely to enable workers to balance their work and personal life. Four statements were included in the questionnaire to test this:

- 1. *The organisation actively promotes policies on flexible working*
- 2. *Managers are understanding about employees having to meet personal/family responsibilities*
- 3. *Supervisors/managers would juggle schedules, tasks or duties to accommodate my personal/family responsibilities*
- 4. *Peers are understanding about my having to meet personal/family responsibilities*

Negative relationships between these four items and the three scales of work-family conflict were found (Table 5.12). Thus, those who thought that the organisation actively promoted policies on flexible working, or whose managers, supervisors and peers were understanding about their personal/family responsibilities, were likely to report lower conflict.

This finding shows the vital role in creating the right atmosphere in an organisation and making work-life balance a part of organisational culture to improve work-life balance. However, accepting that the data shows associations not causal relationships, these results are discussed further in Chapter 6 where managers were interviewed to explore in more detail the actual working of the organisation. Since managers and supervisors play a key role in implementing organisational policies, their role is given particular attention in the discussion there.

	Supportive organisational policies	Supportive managers	Supportive supervisors	Supportive peers
General work-family conflict	-0.2144***	-0.2172***	-0.2446***	-0.2328***
Time-based work-family conflict	-0.2815***	-0.3050***	-0.1975**	-0.2685***
Strain-based work-family conflict	-0.2472***	-0.3182***	-0.2264***	-0.2738***

Table 5.12: Correlations between working atmosphere and work-family conflict

Partial correlations:

The zero order correlations of Table 5.9, 5.10 and 5.12 were analysed further to study how much of the relationship remains after the contribution of selected variables has been removed or partialled out. Three test variables were selected – gender, occupational groups and working hours. While gender has been the basis of comparison groups through out the study, differences in the attitudes of managers towards work-life questions provided the argument to partial out their contribution to these responses. The nominal variable of occupational groups was recoded as a dichotomous variable for this analysis – the two groups were managers vs. all other occupations. The associations between long-working hours and the three conflict scales, as well as other dependent variables (e.g. increase in stress) justified its use as the third test variable. The criteria to judge whether the conditional relationships was substantially lower than the initial relationship was a difference of at least 0.1 between the two.

24 out of the 26 correlations were replicated. The difference in correlation coefficients was most notable in Table 5.9. Thus, the zero-order and partial correlations of Table 5.9 are presented in Table 5.13. The two correlations which were no longer significant were the relationships between time and strain based conflict and increased responsibilities – these zero-order relationships were weak as well. Hence it is concluded that no relationship was found between increased responsibilities and conflict in this study.

		Increased stress	Increased working hours	Increased responsibilities
General work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.2237***	0.2950***	0.1162
	Partial	0.2573***	0.2198***	0.0846
Time based work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.2239***	0.2765***	0.1311*
	Partial	0.2412***	0.2040**	0.1048
Strain based work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.2825***	0.2742***	0.1593*
	Partial	0.2760***	0.1982*	0.1184

Table 5.13: Zero-order and partial correlations controlling for gender, occupational groups and working hours.

Summary: The key findings from this section are as follows;

- Limited evidence was found to link the new demographic components of the workforce with higher work-family conflict.

- Managers (especially female managers) and professionals suffered from the highest work-family conflict among the occupational groups. These two occupational groups are likely to possess higher intra-organisational negotiating power, and represent the ‘knowledge’ workers of tomorrow, but were least likely to think that flexible working could help them.
- Longer working hours, increasing stress and workload are associated with higher conflict.
- Higher work-family conflict is correlated with lower work satisfaction and lower commitment to the organisation.
- Use of part-time or flexi-time significantly lowers work-family conflict.
- A family-friendly working atmosphere in the organisation may reduce conflict on the work-family interface.

Some of the findings, such as those relating to managers and professionals, mark a permanent change in the conflict likely to be experienced by the employees of tomorrow. On the other hand, it is debatable that the trends studied, which have been on the increase (long working hours, increasing workload, stress and responsibilities), mark a temporary or permanent feature of work. As a result, they may or may not have a long-term effect on work-family conflict. Nevertheless, the associations found are helpful in understanding how work affects family, especially in times of change.

The evidence of a reduction in work-family conflict through the use of flexible working and creating a family friendly working atmosphere in the organisation supports the use of formal and informal flexibility as a work-life policy.

5.7 BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING AMONG THOSE CURRENTLY MAKING USE OF IT

This section aims to understand the possible benefits of flexible working on individuals in their work and in their home lives. A strong positive response would reinforce the use of flexibility in general as a work-life policy. In addition, differences between groups based on personal and work-related characteristics may provide insight into which employee groups find flexibility more useful, and why others were less likely to

do so. However, the results reported in this section may be more positive than the actual benefits, influenced by employees' desire to report positively in order to retain or increase use and availability of flexibility.

A list of benefits was provided to find out if individuals agreed with these. Respondents, who were either users of flexible working or said that it was available to them, reported extremely positive results on its use or availability (Figure 5.3). The results were more absolute for benefits to the individual and their family, although benefits to them in their work were also extremely high.

Among the various employee groups, when taking the advantages altogether, significant differences existed between occupational groups ($F=2.98^*$), with managers and senior administrators finding flexibility least useful. Repeating this analysis while controlling for gender revealed that this finding was specific to the male group ($F=3.35^*$), with male managers least likely to report any benefits. No significant difference was found between occupational groups for female.

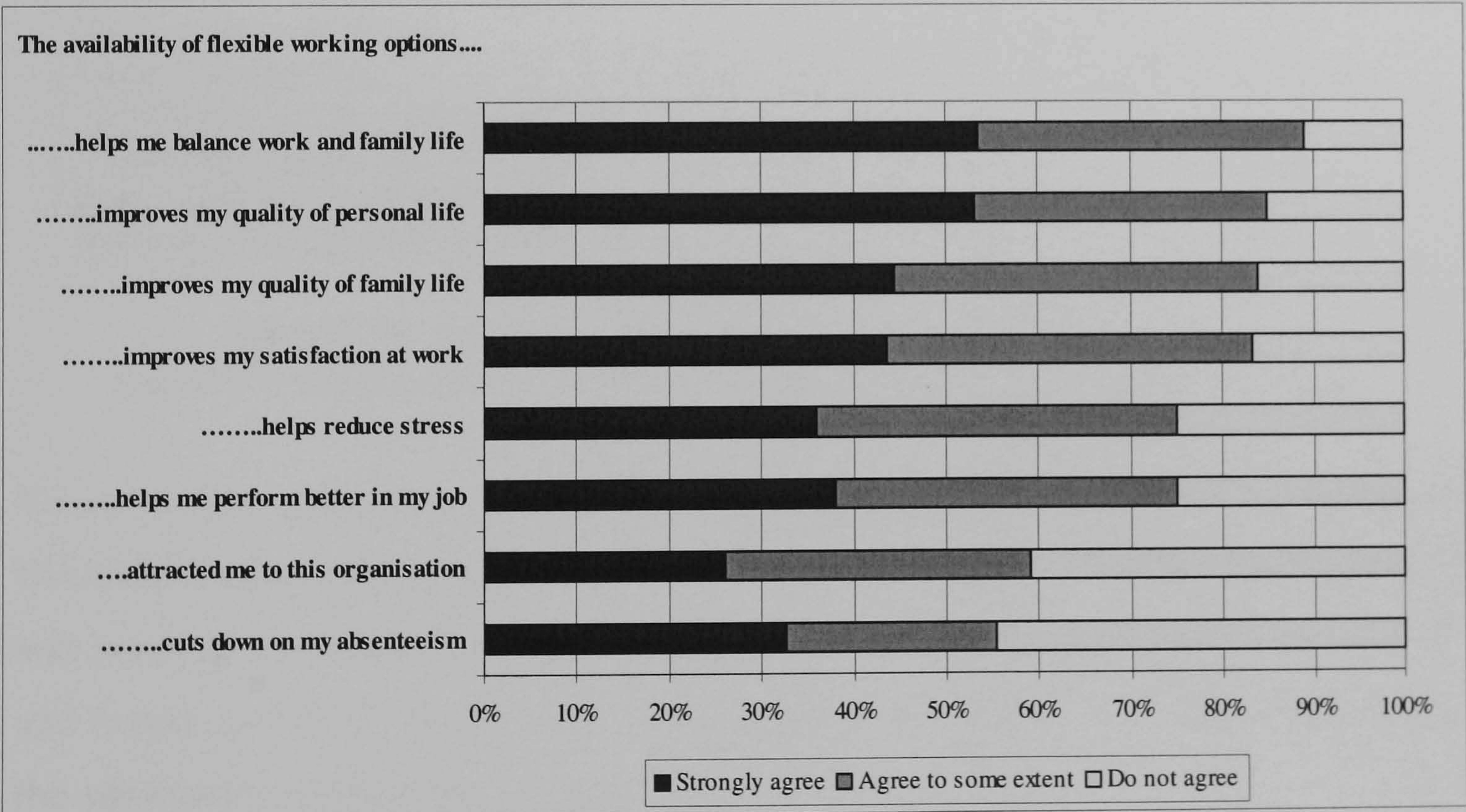


Figure 5.3: Effects of flexible working (n=143)

These results relate to the earlier findings (reported in Section 5.4.1 and Section 5.6.1) that managers and professionals are least likely to think that flexible working can help them balance their work and personal lives, and were less likely to use or desire flexible

working options. Gender was found to influence the response of managers in these analyses as well.

No differences were found on the reported benefits of flexible working according to age, gender, childcare responsibilities, education and income. However, analysis on the basis of six types of households (Table 5.14), showed that those from a traditional family with children were least likely to think that flexibility improved their quality of personal life or the quality of their family life, while dual career couples with children found them most useful. Given that the latter comprise the largest group in the sample (at 41 percent), and the former were a negligible 4 percent, the benefits are clearly important. T-test comparisons of ‘traditional’ fathers versus dual career fathers reinforced the finding that flexibility affects the quality of personal life ($t=3.73^{***}$) and quality of family life ($t=3.23^{**}$) of these men differently. Thus an increase in dual-career couples can be linked to a greater desire for flexible working by men as well.

	Quality of personal life	Quality of family life
	F=2.84*	F=3.69**
Single without children	1.58	1.92
Single with children	1.67	1.67
‘Traditional family’ without children	2.00	2.00
‘Traditional family’ with children	2.57	2.43
Dual career family without children	1.61	1.74
Dual career family with children	1.51	1.45

Table 5.14: Improvement in quality of personal and family life
(ANOVA results; lower value shows higher conflict; range 1-3; F = F-ratio)

Those working part-time were significantly more likely to say that the availability of flexibility attracted them to the organisation ($t=2.43^*$), helped them balance their work and personal lives ($t=2.50^{**}$), and improved the quality of their personal ($t=2.55^{**}$) and family ($t=2.53^{**}$) lives. Presumably, part-timers were most probably referring to the advantages of part-time working. Thus, options that allow a reduction in working time are most beneficial, though not always practical, as would be expected. This is discussed further in Section 5.8.1 and Section 6.4.

The benefits of flexible working were also one of the issues most commented on by employees at the end of the survey.

Flexitime is crucial in my ability to perform well at work! It is a door that swings both ways. Many times I must stay focused on a work assignment longer than a seven hour day, to get the result I want. I am comfortable and committed to giving that concentrated time because I know that the Company is flexible and I can recoup the time when the schedule allows. (40-50 years old, female, associate professional or technician)

In summary, providing flexible work options improves the personal and working lives of the workforce. Personal benefits are highest for dual career couples, while men in managerial jobs are least likely to find flexibility useful.

5.8 FACTORS LIKELY TO INFLUENCE THE NEGOTIATING POWER OF EMPLOYEES

This section analyses the survey questions on negotiating power. Three factors were considered to influence the power of the employee:

- (i) work-related characteristics that define centrality and difficulty in substitutability
- (ii) willingness to trade time for income
- (iii) readiness to vote with the feet

The following sub-sections report summary findings and results of sub-group analysis based on personal and work-related characteristics.

5.8.1 Work-related characteristics that define centrality and difficulty in substitutability.

Four statements were included in the questionnaire to measure centrality and substitutability of a person and their skills. No differences were found in the analysis on the statements in centrality (Statement 1 and 2 of D-1, Appendix A). Significant differences existed between sub-groups in response to the two statements which focus on difficulty in substitutability (Table 5.15). Corresponding mean values showed that those with higher educational qualifications, those in higher income groups, and managers and professionals were most likely to think that they and their skills were not easily

replaceable. This finding justifies and reinforces the use of education, annual income and occupational groups as the categories defining intra-organisational negotiating power.

	Educational groups	Occupational groups	Income groups
I am easily replaceable	F=5.03**	F=3.97**	F=5.93***
My skills are easily replaceable	F=3.73**	F=4.53***	F=5.77***

Table 5.15: Work-related characteristics defining intra-organisational negotiating power (ANOVA results; F=F-ratio)

Personal characteristics were not found to influence self-perception of centrality and difficulty in substitutability.

5.8.2 Willingness to trade time for income

On assuming that willingness to trade pay for reduced working time can be taken as an indicator of stronger needs and/or higher desire for a better work-life balance, two questions were included in the questionnaire:

- 1. Would flexible working options that involve a trade-off between hours worked and income be attractive to you?*
- 2. If you had a choice, would you trade-off a proportion of your pay for more free time?*

As many as 56 percent of respondents were interested in at least one of the flexible working options involving a trade-off between hours worked and income, and 32 percent were ready to trade-off a proportion of their pay for more free time.

As Table 5.16 shows, a higher percentage of women were interested in reduced hours flexible working options, as well as in trading-off pay for free time (as expected). While no differences were observed on the basis of childcare, when childcare was introduced as a control in the analysis on the basis of gender, no difference was found between men and women without children, but a stronger than original difference was found between men and women with children ($v=0.41^{***}$) for interest in reduced hours flexibility. Exploring the association between childcare, gender and interest in trade-off options further, the analysis for childcare was controlled for gender. No difference was

found between women, but 61 percent of men without children were interested in reduced hours options as opposed to 39 percent of those with children ($v=0.2943^{**}$). No differences were found in the interest in trading-off pay for free time in these analyses with control variables.

Analysis on the basis of an additional independent variable showed that those who were the primary carers (whether men or women), showed a much greater interest in both kinds of trade-off than those who had children but who were not the primary carers (Table 5.16). The latter (who were more likely to be men) felt stronger responsibilities to earn, and were less able to take a pay-cut for a better work-life balance.

	Interest in reduced hours flexibility options	Interest in trading-off pay for free time
Sex		
Men	39%	24%
Women	65	37
	$V=0.254^{***}$	$V=0.1289^{*}$
Childcare responsibilities		
Primary carer of children	64%	33%
Have children but not primary carer	18	11
No dependants	60	38
	$V=0.3158^{***}$	$V=0.1959^{**}$

Table 5.16: Sub-groups interested in time-income trade-off options
(Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V)

Thus, men and women without children were equally likely to be interested in time-income trade-off options. Men, after having children, are less likely to be interested in reducing working time, indicating how the work-life needs of men change through the lifecycle.

No significant differences were observed on the basis of income or occupational groups, with as many as 60 percent of professionals and 43 percent of managers showing an interest in at least one of the listed flexible working options, and 33 percent of professionals and 26 percent of managers ready to trade-off pay for more free time.

These findings, on attractiveness of flexible working options that involve reduction in income, are not consistent with earlier findings (Section 5.5.1), especially in the response of individuals with higher intra-organisational negotiating power. There may be an explanation for this. The two questions, though similar to each other, were asked in two different sections of the questionnaire. The first section covered day to day policy and practice in the organisation, while the latter section asked about scope for development of policies in the future. Thus, on the one hand, a greater interest by groups with higher intra-organisational power in the latter section indicates these groups actually desire reduced time working. In day to day practice, they find hindrances (such as reluctance by supervisors, psychological barriers or adverse effects on career prospects) in reducing working time. When they came across questions on 'scope for further development of policy', they announced their interest. On the other hand, this response, of higher interest in reduced time working options, may only be a latent demand, which in practice they may be unwilling to act on or take up.

Results from the second question in this section, on trading off a proportion of pay for more free time, supports the first of the above two explanations. Groups with higher intra-organisational negotiating power were equally likely to be prepared for such a trade-off. In fact, those with the highest qualification were most likely to be prepared to trade-off a proportion of pay for more free time, while those with the lowest qualifications were least likely to do so (42 percent versus 10 percent; $v=0.1817^*$). Though one might think that this finding is due to the association between education and income, further analysis showed this was not the case.

Thus, those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power could be interested in reducing their working time, and be ready to take a pay cut for a better balance. However, the response of all employees to the above two questions should be viewed critically, as a latent demand, expressed by employees for expanding choice in organisational policy in the future, that may not translate into actual demand even under the most favourable circumstances.

5.8.3 Readiness to vote with their feet

The ultimate negotiating power of individuals in an organisation comes from their readiness to ‘vote with their feet’ (Giddens, 1979; Jo-Hatch, 1995). With this in mind, respondents were given a list of choices and asked to select one of the alternatives only (Table 5.17).

If your organisation is not ready to facilitate you in achieving work-life balance, which of the options given below would you choose?	(%)
Do nothing about it	38
Leave for another similar job (but better work-life benefits)	28
Start looking for another job	19
Leave for a flexible job for which you are over-qualified	3
Become self-employed	3
Leave work/ paid work	2
Others (please tick and specify)	6

Table 5.17: How employees will respond to achieve their desired work-life balance

Only 38 percent of the respondents said they would do nothing about trying to achieve a better work-life balance. The reactions of the remaining 62 percent vary – from leaving for a similar job with better work-life benefits (28 percent), to leaving paid work altogether (2 percent). A clear majority is thus prepared to leave the organisation, which should be a concern to any employer.

Dividing respondents into those who would take some action and those who would not, women once again showed a greater interest in improving their work-life balance ($v=0.1556^*$), though the difference was not as significant as one might expect – 68 percent women would take some action compared with 52 percent men. Surprisingly, those with children were less likely to take any action ($v=0.1445^*$), perhaps indicating the responsibilities that come with dependant children, which makes it more difficult to ‘vote with the feet’. In fact, the larger the number of children, the less probability the person would take some action ($v=0.2244^{**}$) – the percentages of those who would take no action with one, two and three children being 34%, 44% and 71% respectively.

When the analysis for gender was controlled for childcare, the difference between men and women ceased to exist for those without children. However, men with children were less likely to take action as opposed to women with children ($v=0.2004^*$). This

finding can be interpreted in two ways – either that the ability to take action for a better work-life balance decreases for men after having children, or that women become more willing to take action after having children. While the earlier finding, that those with children are less likely to take any action, supports the first of the two explanations, this could not be confirmed since the childcare analysis controlled for gender did not provide any significant differences. Thus, the data from this question does not provide guidance as to which of the above interpretations is closer to the truth. While the latter is common belief, the former was supported by the data in Section 5.8.2.

No differences existed on the basis of any of the work-related characteristics. This is not surprising since the list of possible responses strongly varied in the nature of alternatives they offered. Nevertheless, the absence of differences shows that high-status employees are equally likely to take action, though it is not possible to explore what action they are likely to take. A significantly larger sample would have made it possible to explore associations between each of the individual response, and personal and work-related characteristics.

While 28 percent of respondents believe that jobs with reasonable work-life benefits exist, only one-third of all respondents in a separate question were aware however of work-life options available in other organisations. Similarly, only one-third of the 28 percent who said they would leave for another job with better work-life benefits were aware of work-life options elsewhere, indicating again that such statements are based more on desirability than factual information.

Finally, the question of readiness to take action was asked to the employees of an organisation. Those remaining with the organisation are likely to be relatively happy. The dissatisfied individuals many have already taken action.

5.8.4 Summary

High levels of interest were shown in reducing working time, and a large proportion of employees were ready to vote with their feet to achieve their desired work-life balance. Perhaps this is the reason why organisations are showing greater interest in the work-life balance of their employees. However, the findings in this section should also be

viewed critically, as there may be a substantial difference between latent and actual demand, and between employees saying something and doing it.

Specific findings show that:

- Higher educational groups, higher income groups, and managers and professionals are likely to have higher intra-organisational negotiating power because of the difficulty in substituting them.
- Women may have higher negotiating power in the work-life debate because they are more willing for time-income trade-off. They were also more likely to take action for a better work-life balance.
- Many of the difference between men and women were influenced by childcare responsibilities. Having children may reduce the ability/desire to achieve a better work-life balance among men and increase this ability/desire among women.
- Those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power (higher educated, higher income, managers and professionals) were equally likely to show an interest in reduced working time, and to vote with their feet.

5.9 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Flexible working is highly desired as a work-life policy by employees in Company A – they desire it for themselves, and for others in the organisation. In general, there were hardly any contradictions between employee sub-groups that might indicate ‘multiplicity of demand’ [H4]. Thus, the potency of pressure upon management to provide flexibility is likely to be stronger than if contradictory demands had been made by sub-groups (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991).

However, this finding may be influenced by selection and non-response bias. As discussed earlier (Section 4.4.1) the questionnaire may have been returned by those interested in work-life issues. Nevertheless, the response rate was 49 percent. However, Company A had been offering work-life policies for more than a few years at the time of the survey. Thus, the organisation may be attracting and retaining employees who hold work-life balance in greater significance than the whole population. Thus, for all the questions analysed, while non-response may influence the true-picture within

Company A, both non-response and sample bias was likely to influence the generalisability of results.

The desire for a better work-life balance, use and desirability of flexibility revealed certain differences between employee groups. However, positive associations of newer demographic groups with flexible working or work-life balance were not as marked as were anticipated [H1]. The desire for a better work-life balance was stronger among certain women, but childcare, household status, or age were not found to influence desire for a better work-life balance. Gender differences in the use and desire for flexible working were significant only in the options that involve reduced hours working – working options that allow flexibility within a full-time contract were equally desired by men and women. Childcare influenced gender desire for reduced time flexibility, and there were some (non-statistical) findings showing that the men interested in reduced time options were mostly from dual-career households. Once again, age did not influence desire for flexible working.

Findings also indicated that women may have greater negotiating power in the work-life debate because they were more willing for time-income trade-offs and more likely to take action for a better work-life balance – acts which are equated to the ability to accomplish their will and greater bargaining power [H3]. Perhaps it can be said that partnered women, particularly when they have children, have stronger out-of-work needs, and often because of the security of a second income in the household, are able to take a reduction in pay, or leave their job if their needs are not catered for, which gives them more negotiating power. It is through this negotiating power, to vote with their feet, that women started the family-friendly debate, through the introduction of part-time working many decades ago. However, as the work-life debate has developed, and as employees have become aware of additional possibilities, gender has become less of an issue in this debate. Nevertheless, as long as the deeply ingrained social roles of women as carers of children (and of the elderly), and of men as the primary breadwinners, remains, differentiation will persist in the use and desire for reduced hours flexibility options between men and women. Parts of data also indicated that childcare decreases the desire of men to take up reduction in pay and the ability to vote with their feet.

The higher educated, higher income, managerial and professional groups perceived themselves to be more difficult to replace [H2]. However, the hypothesis that these groups will receive preferential treatment because of their status was not supported. In fact, they were less likely to think that flexibility, especially reduced hours flexibility, was available to them, and also less likely to desire it. The reasons for their lower interest in reduced time working options need to be studied further.

However, these sub-groups were found to be interested in full-time flexibility options, such as flexi-time and home-working, and their interest in one form of flexibility (compressed work weeks) was higher than those with lower intra-organisational negotiating power. If, as discussed above, reduced time flexibility is either incompatible with these jobs, or less likely to be desired by individuals with such characteristics, full-time flexibility options may be given more consideration, since full-time flexible working can also help reduce conflict. At this stage there is no evidence that the introduction of full-time flexible working options in Company A was because of requests from those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power. However, the availability of extended leave options is one area where these groups were more likely to perceive that such options were available to them, perhaps indicating a greater desire by management to retain these employees.

Flexible working was found to lower work-family conflict, which is consistent with the findings of other researchers (Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Judge et al., 1994; Ezra and Deckman, 1996), suggesting that it is a useful work-life policy. No difference was found in work-family conflict among men and women. This is also consistent with the findings of other researchers (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992, 1997). Childcare responsibilities were not found to affect work-family conflict, contrary to initial predictions based on desk research (Judge et al., 1994; Frone and Yardley, 1996). This could be because of the variety of flexibility options available in Company A, which has made it possible to reduce work-life conflict. Once again, interest in reduced hours options was higher among those with children, especially primary carers of children (who were also more likely to be women).

As other researchers have found, longer working hours were associated with higher conflict, challenging the 'presentism' culture. Increased stress and workload were linked

to higher conflict, and these trends have reportedly been on the increase. Thus, these changes at work, which could be either temporary or permanent, may disturb the work-life balance of employees.

There was evidence to suggest that flexible working options are a successful work-life policy. As others have shown, users of part-time working and flexi-time report significantly lower conflict than non-users. Those who perceived managers and peers to be understanding about their out-of-work responsibilities, report lower conflict than those who do not share this point-of-view. A significant majority of those who were using some form of flexible working option reported its positive effects on their personal and family lives, as well as on work satisfaction and performance, and in reducing stress. Nearly half such users also suggested that it cuts down on their absenteeism, and attracted them to the organisation.

In the analysis of sub-groups, managers and senior administrators deserve special attention. Of all occupational groups, they faced the highest conflict, as attested to by other researchers (Judge et al., 1994). The differences in observed conflict were more robust for female managers than male managers. Male managers, who were likely to be more senior, also felt that flexibility could not help them improve their balance, and were least likely to report benefits of flexible working. Since the negative effects of work-family conflict are well researched, it is worth asking whether organisations want their key employers to be faced with high conflict. Also, as implementers of organisational policies, and as role models for other employees, their attitudes are filtered to others in the organisation.

For the future, changing demographics are likely to play a role in expanding the use of flexibility although the findings were not as absolute as were anticipated. Increasing number of women with children entering the workforce are likely to accelerate the work-life debate, through their ability to reduce working time and also through their ability to vote with their feet. However, men too – and there was evidence to suggest men particularly from dual career families – have greater interest in flexibility than men from ‘traditional’ families. Thus, it can be said that the influx of women from various lifecycle stages in the workforce has disturbed the work-life balance of men as well. If work-life options are not narrowed to reduced hours working only, men are clearly

more interested in flexibility than in the past. A larger sample, perhaps in different kinds of organisations, may reveal other groups (such as single male parents) who might have an impact on the development of new kinds of policies.

Looking ahead, if the responsibility and stress in the average job is likely to increase, as it has been doing in the recent past, and if this increases work-family conflict, such conflict will deserve more attention – in particular as it was found highly associated with managerial and professional roles, whose jobs can be more stressful, whose proportion in the workforce is on the increase, and who report the highest levels of conflict.

With this in mind, we now turn to the managerial interviews, to understand how Company A has adapted to the changing desires of individuals. Particular attention is given to the negotiating power of the employee (especially as defined by demography and occupational group) to understand how such factors have influenced the introduction and expansion of flexible working as a work-life policy, or might do so in the future.

CHAPTER 6

THE EMPLOYEE VERSUS THE EMPLOYER

IN COMPANY A

Company A is an employee friendly organisation, and operates a variety of flexible working options. Part-time working and flexi-time are widely practised, but job-sharing, term-time working, annualised hours, compressed work weeks, and home working are also used. Other family friendly options include a child nursery near the head-office, childcare vouchers in cafeteria benefits, family days-off, a counselling service, self-growth and personal finance policies, as well as a fitness centre and a variety of facilities at the larger work-sites.

Chapter 5 discussed findings from the employee survey, reporting employee attitudes towards flexibility. Variation in use, availability and desirability of flexible working options between employee groups was established. Flexible working was shown to be a useful work-life policy, since its users reported lower conflict on the work-family interface, and because employees found it beneficial. However, the analysis in Chapter 5 also pointed out that employees would like far more flexibility than is available to them, and a significant proportion are prepared to take pay cuts and move jobs to improve their work-life balance.

In this chapter, we find out why Company A is offering a range of flexible working and family friendly policies, and what factors influenced it to reach its present state. If and when there are differences in offering policies, why do they exist? Moreover, what are the internal and external changes likely to influence the future of these policies, and thus, will employees get the greater flexibility they desire. Four topics are covered:

1. Perceived benefits of flexible working by the employer
2. Negotiating power of the employee versus the employer
3. Division of responsibility to create a better work-life balance
4. External factors influencing the work-life debate

Whereas Chapter 5 reported analysis from the employee survey, this chapter presents findings from interviews carried out with the management of Company A, although it

also draws on the employee survey. Four of the five interviewees were with the senior management of the organisation representing Retail Operations, Mortgage Operations, Customer Relations, and Personnel. The fifth interviewee was the General Secretary of the Staff Union. Interviews varied from one to two hours in length.

The interviews covered questions on use and availability, and cost and benefits, of flexible working. Personal and work-related employee characteristics, as well as external factors that are likely to influence the negotiating power between the employee and employer were discussed. As discussed in Section 4.4.1, a large part of the data discussed in this Chapter relies on the opinion, perceptions and memory of the interviewees. Multiple interviews, especially when they generate similar answers to key questions, can reduce this limitation of the data. When a certain point was made clearly by every interviewee, this has been clearly indicated to improve reliability of data.

6.1 PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING BY THE EMPLOYER

This section aims to establish if the employing organisation finds flexible working beneficial. Its purpose is to provide background for the forthcoming section on negotiating power – if the organisation perceives flexibility to be beneficial, it is more likely to provide employees with their desired flexibility without being put under pressure to do so, and hence the significance of employee ‘negotiating power’ as a determining factor decreases.

In this section, attention is given to bottom-line benefits, or the soft-issues. Compatibility with business needs or possible direct business benefits are discussed in Section 6.2.

A brief question during the interview – *‘What are the costs or benefits of offering such a variety of flexible working options to your employees?’* – resulted in elaborate comments. All interviewees reported extremely positive results.

While no formal studies had been carried out in Company A to measure the positive effects of flexible working (e.g. on stress, motivation, commitment or productivity of employees), managers were confident that such affirmative outcomes existed. Brief

remarks by two managers – ‘*You can understand by talking to people*’, or ‘*It comes across in appraisals*’ – explains the general feeling among managers.

A large number of remarks were made, and examples given, on how flexibility had helped to attract, retain and motivate employees, and also improve their productivity and satisfaction with the job. The two comments below show how flexibility was perceived to (a) improve productivity, and (b) attract and retain employees.

Probably part-timers who are working a relatively short day are more productive during those four hours that they are with us. I'd expect them to do more during those four hours. I wouldn't expect someone who is working eight hours to do twice as much as a person working four, because we've got to put in the breaks, and people get tired. So there is a little more productivity.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

People, especially in financial service, do get head-hunted, but a lot of people who leave the company do come back.

(Head of Retail Operations - South)

One of the managers gave details from the annual in-house survey, quoting figures from his business unit. This showed 77 percent were satisfied with their job in 1999, as against 21 percent in 1995, which he accounted for in terms of employee involvement and flexibility.

Drawbacks in offering flexibility were also highlighted, however. The most common problem was a fixed limit to the number of employees that could use a particular form of flexibility beyond a certain threshold number. For example, in a sub-unit with five individuals, only one was allowed to use term-time working. Similarly, use of compressed work weeks had to be monitored since everyone preferred to have Friday afternoon off. Another issue raised was dealing with any feeling of unfairness between employees. However, the problems raised do not challenge the core benefits of flexible working, but point towards practical problems and limitations in managing flexibility.

In this instance, when the benefits of flexible working are so widely accepted by employees and managers in Company A, the discussion on bargaining power is not

likely to be as relevant as it would be in an organisation where there is a mis-match between the desires of individuals, and attitudes of management (Figure 3.1). Nevertheless, the following section shows that negotiating power still plays a part.

6.2 NEGOTIATING POWER OF THE EMPLOYEE VERSUS THE EMPLOYER

This section aims to understand factors influencing the negotiating power of the employer and employee. The ‘power struggle’ between these two is the focal point of the research framework (Figure 3.1). It is through the concept of negotiating power that we can comprehend how long-term change in work-life policies may be brought about.

Personal and work-related characteristics of employees which were thought to influence their bargaining position were discussed in detail in interviews with the management. These were:

- The demographic group to which the individual belongs (e.g. women, especially those with young children)
- Centrality of the individual/group in terms of the knowledge and skills they bring to the organisation

Interviewees were also asked about the reasons behind differences in the availability and use of flexible working options between business units, and between occupational groups. During this discussion on negotiating power, interviewees also mentioned additional attributes that are likely to influence the relative power of employees and employers.

Institutional pressures, external environmental characteristics, and organisational traits which may influence the provision of work-life policies in organisations are discussed separately in Section 6.4.

The **demographic grouping** of the individual can influence their negotiating power. As the previous chapter showed, distinctions exist between groups based on demographics

in their willingness to trade income for more time (Section 5.5 and Section 5.8), and in their ability to vote with their feet (Section 5.8). However, this distinction ceases to exist when it comes to full-time flexible working options. As Company A offers full- and part-time flexible working options, and their policies do not distinguish between demographic groups, the discussion on negotiating power on the basis of these groups was revealing.

As an employee-friendly organisation, management interviews clearly reflected an understanding of the modern work-life needs of employees. This acknowledgement was one of the reasons for offering the variety of flexible working options available in the organisation.

There are several things happening here. The young man of today aspires to having much more contact and much more involvement with family, then perhaps several years ago, for several reasons...and that is presenting a challenge to the employer... I think that is why we have arrived today where we are – which is this work-life issue, and I think it's been driven by the men, rather than the women. ...A lot of employers have addressed the concerns of the female – part-time, job-share, term-time working, maternity, temporary jobs, home working – traditionally nearly all of those have been filled by women, because they have been put in place in order to attract women, and for the women. But the men are now beginning to say that there is another side to it, that we too want to have a better balance in our lives, which is why I think you will find that the gender issue goes out of flexibility. It becomes much more of a 'this is work-life for everyone'.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

This organisation is at a relatively advanced stage in offering work-life policies. At an earlier stage, demographics had played a central role in the introduction of flexible working policies. That is, as in many other organisations, part-time work, which is the oldest flexible working policy in the organisation, was introduced to retain women returning from maternity leave – all interviewees shared this opinion. The manner in which new mothers were able to change the attitudes of management many decades ago is a good example of the power of employees, through their ability to vote with their

feet, since failure to provide flexibility would have resulted in women leaving their jobs, as they often did.

At present, organisational policies do not differentiate on the basis of demographics, but in day-to-day practice demographic grouping does influence the bargaining power of the individual. Women, especially those with young children, could be favoured in the implementation of policy, as their needs were perceived to be stronger by some of the managers. However, this perception, and hence the influence of demographic grouping on negotiating power, varied between managers.

The policy is available to everybody, but as a manager I would be more sympathetic towards certain requests (from women, especially with young children).....and although there are a large number of policies, ultimately it comes down to informal decisions.

(Head of Mortgage Operations)

I am not sure if women and women with children will have any leverage. They might with certain managers, they might not with others.

(Head of Retail Operations - South)

The second idea debated was whether some groups had higher intra-organisational negotiating **power through the centrality of their skills and difficulty in replacing them**. This idea was not supported by the management interviews, at least not in terms of the day-to-day running of the organisation. However, skills shortages on a national level were likely to increase the power of particular sub-groups.

I don't think anybody is not replaceable. Treating a particular person or group of people differently because of their skills would cause all sorts of difficulties. Talking about the society, yes, you would have that sort of thing in some key categories. There can be some very key individuals, but not in the area we are working in.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

You have to look at the lowest common denominator. If you do it for one, you've got to do it for everybody. If that's going to cause you problems, you might as well say no.

(Head of Mortgage Operations)

But skill shortages can be localised, and not necessarily only in the highly skilled areas. Term-time working was the first ‘new’ type of option introduced, in order to fill some hard-to-fill vacancies in the boom of the late 1980s. Three of the managers interviewed (the remaining two managers were not with the organisation when this policy was introduced) remembered the time and manner in which it was introduced, to attract mature employees with ‘*lifestyle and work experience*’ (women with children who had left the labour market), rather than filling vacancies with young people only.

Moreover, the categories which were assumed in this study to possess higher intra-organisational negotiating power were in jobs which were in fact perceived to be less compatible with flexibility, especially reduced hours flexibility – namely all higher grade jobs, but particularly managerial jobs. Thus, any higher negotiating power these individuals may have was offset by the likelihood of greater (perceived) disruption to organisational routines, creating a mis-match between individuals’ desires and organisational needs. This explained why managers and professionals were less likely to work reduced hours options and considered these options were not available to them (Section 5.5).

The part-time decision is not based on skills or grades at all – it is more of a social agreement – ‘You have worked for us and made a good contribution, so you want to move to part-time now’. As you go up the branch level, it is the same. Any higher, it will have to be, ‘Can you make the required contribution by working flexibly?’ There are no clear-cut distinctions, but there aren’t many part-time jobs in this organisation at some of the more senior levels.

(Head of Retail Operations - South)

I don’t think a manager’s job can be done on a reduced hours basis.

(Head of Mortgage Operations)

However, two factors are likely to improve the negotiating power of these groups, and other employees as well, in requesting flexibility. First of these is **changing business needs**, particularly longer bank opening hours. As the higher skilled, higher educated individuals are more likely to desire full-time flexibility (Section 5.5), changing

business needs which increase the choice of using full-time flexible working options improve the possibility of a match between the needs of the two parties. These changes are also most likely to play a key role in expanding the use of flexibility in the future for all individuals, and the negotiating power of employees generally is likely to increase under this arrangement.

The business knows that it also needs more flexibility because we are going to be heading for a 24 hours environment. Somehow in here there has to be a pay-off. I think it is going to be a different kind of bargaining arrangement. I think the employees will have much more power in that bargaining arrangement. That's where probably the major shift will happen.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

The company needs to be aware of the changing working practices in the sector, with players such as the supermarkets entering financial services, and having long working hours. With longer working hours, there will be improved motivation for management because there will be greater flexibility to accommodate requests for flexibility by employees.

(General Secretary - Staff Union)

The second factor is an overt effort by those involved in designing flexible working policies in Company A to increase **use of flexibility in all jobs**. Alternative working methods which provide flexibility within a full-time contract have been growing in the organisation, mostly at the request of employees, and have progressively taken the shape of formal policies. Even so, flexibility is used less in managerial jobs – an attitude the flexible working programme co-ordinator is trying to change.

Sometimes line managers can be their own worst enemy.....we are telling them, think how can I work my day differently? and, if I wanted to work my day differently, have I got the choice of half a dozen people who could, for an hour or two, take the supervisory responsibilities in my absence? So we are saying, what is there stopping a line manager from flexing their hours?

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

Another aspect of the negotiating power of employees, which emerged during discussions was their **knowledge of what it is possible for the organisation to offer**, and what is compatible with business needs. This information enables them to differentiate the ‘true’ mis-match between their desired flexibility options and their jobs, as opposed to a psychological or habitual mis-match created through use of 9-5 routines.

Employees are now getting really wise’d up to what is possible for them.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

I think it will ultimately be desired by more and more employees as it becomes apparent as to how it can work.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

Some **psychological barriers** also came to light in these discussions. Since it is an organisation committed to improve work-life balance of its employees through flexibility, management monitors and evaluates policies. The knowledge HR managers had gathered indicates that beyond organisational policies and the practical limitation in expanding the use of flexibility, the true struggle is between the employee and their line manager – or with the **attitudes of line managers**.

The barrier, I think the biggest one, would be line managers. They don’t see themselves as employees –they see themselves as managers. They are hooked, if there is such a word, at the idea of having to manage people who are not controlled by the 9-5 normal routine.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

A lot of the employees look very very positively at more flexible ways of working, but some of the managers take the view, ‘Well, the way that I know works perfectly well, therefore I don’t want to rock the boat’. I wouldn’t say it is senior management level, more at middle management level or junior management level. How the organisation is able to achieve a good balance, or help its employees, rests often with individual managers. The good managers do a very good job, and the managers who might be less experienced, or less

open to change, or have their own views on what the organisational culture should be, perhaps don't.

(General Secretary - Staff Union)

In response to this, the company has recently introduced a workshop training programme to improve attitudes towards flexible working, and to provide training, support and advice for managers to deal with flexible working.

Ultimately, however, managers recognise that the power of employees remains their ability to 'vote with their feet'.

I don't know that the individual feels that they have got much negotiating power in this organisation – I don't think that I have any negotiating power. I guess the biggest power that my staff has got is the ability to walk away.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

In summary, the negotiating power of employees on the basis of demographic sub-grouping or centrality and difficulty in substitutability were partially supported. What emerged as the strongest factor influencing any power struggle was the attitudes of line managers. A high desire by employees and senior management to improve the use of flexibility as a work-life policy came through clearly.

The discussion of negotiating power confirmed the relevance of the research framework (Figure 3.1). It helped in comprehending how a possible match or mismatch in organisational and individual's needs affected negotiating power, particularly in understanding why the groups with higher intra-organisational negotiating power were less likely to work flexibly. Through the framework, we can also see how changing business needs, or changing managerial attitudes towards flexibility, could improve the match between individuals and organisation in the future.

6.3 DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATE A BETTER WORK-LIFE BALANCE

While the research framework focuses on the employee and the employer, the responsibility to create a better work-life balance is a collective one. In this section employee and employer perspectives on the relative responsibilities of four stakeholders – government, organisations, individuals and trade-unions – are analysed. The purpose is to find out how employees and employers view their own role, and that of others.

The results here draw on both the employee survey, and management interviews. In both cases, respondents were asked to assign relative responsibility to the four groups (organisations, individuals, government and trade unions).

The rankings given by employees indicate that they felt the main obligation lay with the organisation, followed by the individual, government, and trade unions. (Table 6.1)

	Mean
Organisations should help employees improve the balance between their work and personal life.	1.73
The individual is responsible for finding the job that best suits his/her work-life requirements.	2.21
The government should introduce legislation to support organisations and individuals in creating better work-life balance.	2.83
Trade unions should take an active lead in convincing employers to adapt employee friendly working options.	3.23

Table 6.1: Responsibility for affecting work-life issues
(ranking range = 1-4; 1=top)

In the interviews, however, managers said that the main responsibility lay with the individual;

I've always had the view that the individual should take responsibility for themselves, and they are not doing enough of that. I think the initiative should come from the individual, but the government, and the organisation, and

everybody else for that matter, has got to put in some basic working practice that people can work from, and have some rules, and some guidelines.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

Business and employees should keep their eyes open for the change that is possible, but there should not be too much emphasis on the business driving change.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

Managers agreed, however, that the organisation was more influential than government:

It is the duty of every one in senior management in our organisation to get out and ask people what they want. I think we should be able to do it ourselves, without help from the government.

(Head of Retail Operations - South)

The trade union was seen only as a facilitator by managers, their job being to protect the flexible worker, guiding people, or helping them solve dilemmas on how to manage flexibility or approach management with requests for (more) flexibility.

These findings paint a predictable dilemma. Employees believe that the main responsibility lies with the organisation, while managers believe that individuals should take more initiative and make adjustments to find their desired balance. Since both these parties believe that the other should take the greater share of responsibility, it highlights the significance of negotiating power. Moreover, by emphasising the role of the individual and organisation, compared with the government and trade union, it provides validation for the research framework, which focuses on the relative negotiating power of the individual and the organisation. While government, trade unions, and other external influences cannot be overlooked, the ultimate struggle lies between the individual and the organisation.

6.4 EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE WORK-LIFE DEBATE

This section aims to understand institutional pressures, external environmental characteristics and organisational features which resulted in Company A reaching its present stage in offering work-life policies. It complements the discussion on negotiating power between the employee and the employer (Section 5.2). External factors likely to influence long-term development of work-life policies in Company A and other organisations are highlighted.

The data presented in this section is from the management interviews. The retrospective discussions in this section depend upon the memory of the interviewees, which influences its reliability.

The following were discussed, as factors that may influence the provision of work-life policies:

- What other organisations are offering (as role models or competitors for staff)
- Influences from Europe, for example, through the Social Chapter, or through people being aware of the social demographic systems in some European countries
- Political climate in the UK - Labour versus Conservative governments
- Stages of economic cycle
- Change in social values

The analysis here includes reflection on firm-level research by other researchers (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Bardoel, 1998; Milliken et al., 1998; Osterman, 1995), who, over the past decade, have attempted to understand why organisations have responded differently to work-family issues, and external pressures upon organisations which have increased the significance of work-life balance. This throws light on the possibilities and limitations in the generalisability of results. An appreciation of these wider factors helps to elaborate the original model by locating it in the wider institutional environment (Figure 6.1).

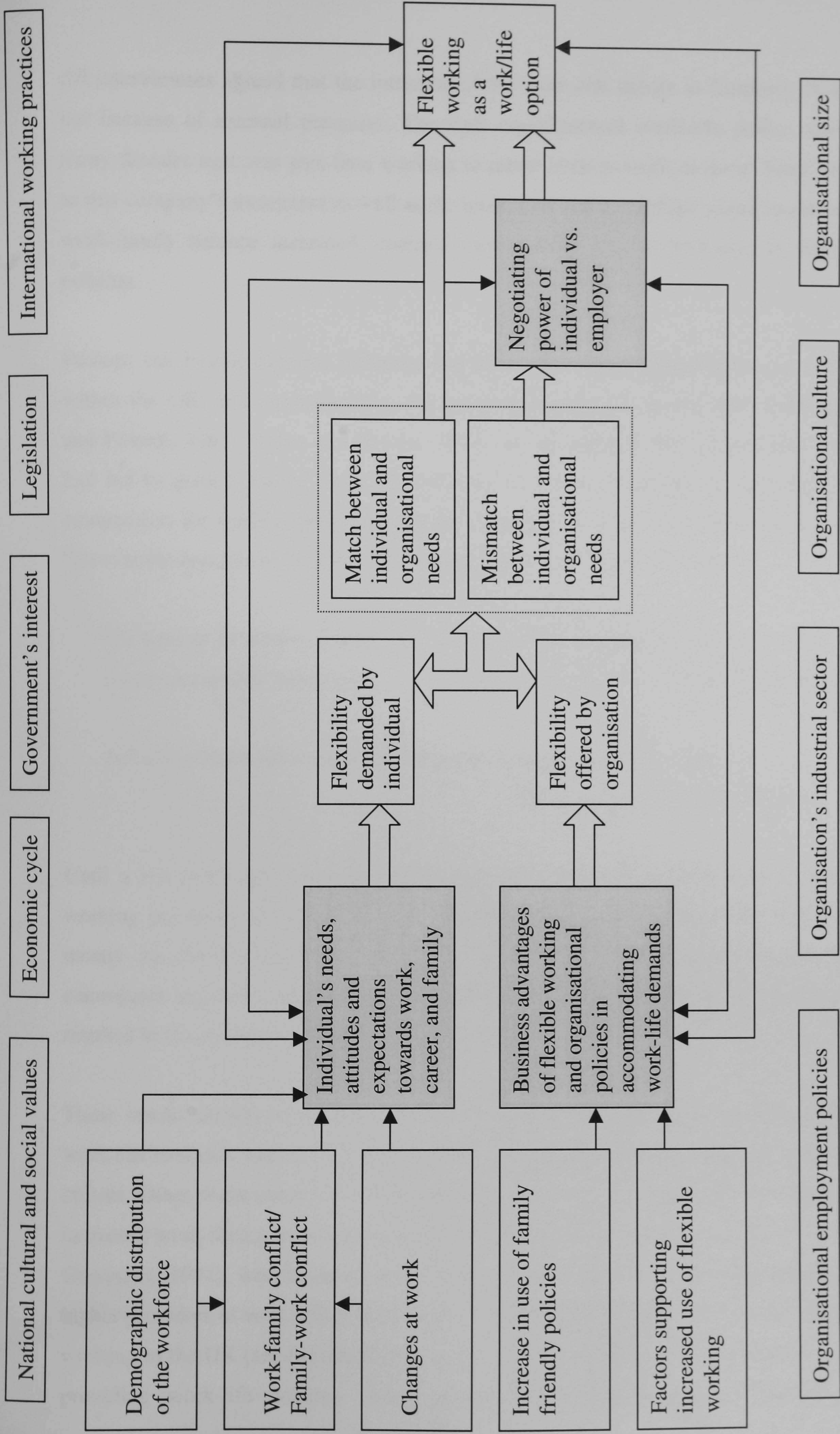


Figure 6.1: Addition of external and internal institutional factors to the research framework

All interviewees agreed that the initiation of the work-life debate in Company A was not because of external pressures. The first organisational work-life policy, started many decades ago, was part-time working to retain back-to-work mothers. Since then, as this company's awareness as well as the interest of western industrialised societies in work-family balance increased, external factors have played their role in shaping policies.

Perhaps the largest external influence has been what other organisations are doing, within the UK, and internationally. An interconnected work environment (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), at the national and international level, had led to greater use of work-life policies. This was recognised as increasing the competition for quality staff, enabling the organisation to develop best practice and discover the benefits of flexible working, and what might work and how.

We have to be aware of what other organisations are offering and what is no longer acceptable behaviour. (Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

Influences from other countries are good for looking at what might work.
(General Secretary – Staff Union)

Until a few years ago, managers would have been more inclined to think that their working practices, and those of other organisations in the UK, had been influenced mostly by the United States. However, the signing of the Social Chapter and consequent legislative changes, and the Labour government's interest in Europe, had resulted in strong influences from Europe as well.

These results should be viewed with two points in mind. Firstly, an interconnected work environment, whether regional, national or global, is likely to vary with industrial sectors. Other researchers have found that the nature of the industry explains variance in overall work-family responsiveness (Milliken et al., 1998; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Goodstein, 1994), with financial services (in which Company A operates) among the higher providers of work-life policies in the USA (Milliken et al., 1998), and of flexible working in the UK (see Section 3.2). Secondly, Company A is at an advanced stage in providing work-life policies. While institutional pressures may be exerted on

organisations via legal coercion and voluntary diffusion (Oliver, 1991; Goodstein, 1994), voluntary adoption reduces the impact of legal coercion. Hence, because of the high level of voluntary adoption, legislation did not appear strongly as the reason for introduction of work-life policies in Company A. Management gave the impression that they tried to stay ahead of legislation. However, some of the policies (the latest being parental leave legislation) had forced changes in organisational policies.

Managers, however, did comment that legislation had influenced changes in other organisations, and that government, had a responsibility, especially to bring about change in those organisations that had little interest in this area (although the power of legislation or government should not be overestimated).

Obviously the government, if it perceives that things are going too far, have to do something, for example, if call centres were truly the sweat shops of the 90s.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

I wouldn't overestimate the power of a government to do anything in the workplace, unless there is a particular legislation, and then there will be ways around it.

(Head of Mortgage Operations -South)

The consensus among managers was that the current Labour government had done more for work-life balance than any other government. Managers did not consider this influence of the present government (1997-2001) to be short-term. The road to the development of work-life policies was described as '*a one way street*', with no room for a '*U-turn*'. Hence, a change in government was unlikely to stop progress on this front.

Another reason for change in organisational policies on work-life balance can be to improve social legitimacy and fitness (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991). Changing social values and cultural norms are the ideal route to bring desired change, and more attention is being given to this perspective (Lewis and Cooper, 1995; NW-LF, 2000; Rifkins, 1995). However, there was pessimism among interviewees whether

such a change was possible or likely in the area of work-life on a national level in the UK.

It takes many, many years to change organisational culture, organisational values. For a country it is likely to be even more gradual. It is difficult not to be sceptical that you could change this country.

(Corporate Personnel Consultant)

However, managers in Company A indicated that part of the reason for offering work-life policies was that they wanted to be 'the employer of choice', thus indicating that providing work-life policies improves social legitimacy.

A major external factor, disturbing the negotiating power of the employee versus the employer would be the economic cycle, and unemployment levels.

Overall, managers believed that a recession would not change the policies offered by the organisation, although it might slow down progress. The organisational culture was not such that employees would hesitate to ask for more flexibility in a recession, or fear that such an action may make them more likely to be made redundant. However, the organisation would be more conscious of costs in a recession, and this might influence the organisational response to requests for flexibility. Managers perceived that a recession was also likely to affect employees' reactions if the organisation was unable to provide employees the flexibility they desired.

The employees won't be less likely to make the approach. The answer and their reaction to it would be different. So if we said no, they won't go off and find something else.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

I think an organisation's got to look long term, and if it's looking long term, it won't just say, 'Oh we'll do it this year, and the next year we won't because we won't need to, and the year afterwards we'll come back'.

(Senior Manager - Customer Relations)

An explanation of why the economic cycle is unlikely to influence organisational policies on work-life in Company A could be that flexibility has become part of the organisational culture.

People fear redundancy in recession time. In the broader scheme of things, it is true that people will be less likely to approach the organisation for flexibility. But our organisation doesn't work like that – people would not feel less secure with us in a recession, it is a cultural thing.

(Head of Mortgage Operations -South)

The Company had several characteristics which have been linked to high users of work-life policies by other researchers. It was large, and such organisations have been found to be more likely to provide work-life benefits (Ingram and Simons, 1995; Goodstein, 1994). Its broader employment strategies reflected high-commitment work systems, and the presence of an Internal Labour Market (ILM) (Osterman, 1995). Thus, nearly half the sample had been with the organisation for more than 10 years, the personnel department was well established, self-managed work-teams and quality programmes were used, meetings between management and union as well as other employees were frequent, and problem-solving groups existed. Thus, the provision of work-life policies in Company A fitted well with other HR policies in the organisation, and played their part in creating a culture of employee involvement and commitment.

Summary

External pressures in the form of legislation, social legitimacy and the economic cycle, thus influenced the adoption of flexible working as a work-life policy, but only to a small degree. Offering flexible working as a work-life policy to its employees fitted with the organisational culture and other HR policies, and managers could clearly see benefits of offering such policies. Hence the management perceived no overt pressure from external factors.

Organisations that do not consider work-life balance to be a significant topic, who have a different approach to labour market, or who are operating in a different industrial sector, may feel the pressure of external factors very differently. Organisations at the initial stages of offering work-life policies may also feel greater pressure from external

factors. Nevertheless, each organisation will respond differently to the same changes in the external environment depending on its internal structure, policies, and managerial attitudes.

Overall, an appreciation of external factors adds richness to the framework. Attitudes of employees and (perceived) business benefits from use of flexibility remained the main factors influencing the adoption of flexible working as a work-life policy.

6.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Senior managers in Company A believe that the availability and use of flexible working attracts and retains workers, and has bottom-line benefits for the organisation. Since both management and employees believe in the benefits of flexibility, negotiating power is not likely to be as relevant in determining the use of flexibility in Company A as it would be in an organisations where the attitudes of the two parties differ. However, a power struggle was still found to exist.

Flexible working options desired by employee groups, and their perceived compatibility varies from job-to-job. Decisions on who is to get flexibility, and the length to which the managers will go to accommodate the needs of employees, varies between managers, and their perception of the strength of employee needs. It was in this process that the greater bargaining position of women (with children) emerged [H3]. Through their perceived greater strength of needs, women with children could have higher negotiating power. Even though the policies did not differentiate in offering flexibility on the basis of any individual characteristics, management could be either more sympathetic towards their requests or accepted that work-life policies were essential to attract and retain working mothers who may otherwise leave the organisation.

Overall, managerial interviews confirmed that the link between gender and flexibility was weakening. Perhaps this can explain why links between newer demographic groups and desire for flexibility were not as strong as anticipated [H1]. It can also throw light on the mixed findings of other researchers, who have tried to find a relationship between female workplace concentration as a predictor of employer provision of work-

family practices (Bardoel, 1998; Milliken et al., 1998; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Goodstein, 1994).

The hypothesis of power-from-status [H2] was not supported as sub-groups with higher intra-organisational negotiating power (namely higher educated, higher income, managers and professionals) were not found to receive any preferential treatment. Even though management acknowledged that some employees were difficult to substitute or replace, it was perceived by the management that differentiation in accommodating the needs of these people, because of their organisational roles or skills, would only raise feelings of unfairness among other employees. Individuals can be given preferential treatment only in case of acute skill shortages in their area of expertise.

Further, the jobs of those presumed to have higher intra-organisational negotiating power in this study were perceived by the management to be less compatible with flexibility, especially reduced hours flexibility. These individuals were less likely to think that such flexibility was available to them, and also less likely to desire it (Chapter 5). The reasons for their lower interest in reduced time working options need to be studied further, with the focus on whether these employees truly do not desire reduced hours flexibility, or if the barriers to their fulfilling their desires are more ideological.

However, these sub-groups were interested in full-time flexibility options (Chapter 5). Even so, no direct evidence was found for the introduction of full-time flexibility options arising due to requests from those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power. This organisation, however, was not facing any skill shortages. Other organisations may, therefore, view this differently.

An aspect of power which emerged during discussions was the attitudes of line managers. Some line managers had found it difficult to break old moulds, and to reduce control over others within their area of supervision – steps necessary to implement flexible working.

From the organisational perspective, the ultimate test in the use of flexibility was compatibility with organisational routines and procedures, as might be expected

(Oliver, 1991). However, distinguishing between actual compatibility and perceived compatibility is crucial, and in this context, once again, the role of managers cannot be underestimated. For the organisation under study, the major forthcoming change likely to increase the use of flexibility is an expansion of opening hours beyond the nine-to-five. Thus the changing business environment plays an important role. In the light of the forthcoming changes, the overall bargaining power of the employee vis-à-vis the employer was perceived to be increasing.

In the study of Company A, individuals and organisation remained the main actors in the work-life debate, though each of the two parties believed that the other should take the greater share of responsibility. While external factors have played their role in the use of flexible working as a work-life policy, and will continue to do so, their influence was found to be limited. However, it is most likely that these external factors have had limited influence because Company A is at an advanced stage in offering work-life policies – institutional pressures and environmental characteristics may effect work-life policies in other organisations very differently.

Finally, the analysis has shown the usefulness of the research framework (Figure 6.1) for analysing the development, availability and take-up of flexible working as a work-life policy. Further research in a second organisation, in the telecommunications sector, will confirm whether or not the model is generalisable, bearing in mind the different stage this latter organisation is at in the adoption of flexible working practices. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 cover analysis of the second organisation.

CHAPTER 7

UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE GROUPS IN COMPANY B

This chapter presents the findings for Company B from a questionnaire administered to 225 employees. This covered five issues:

1. Employee attitudes towards flexible working
2. How different groups perceive flexible working options
3. Sources of work-family conflict
4. The perceived benefits of flexible working among those currently making use of it
5. Factors likely to influence the negotiating power of employees

Since the same questionnaire was administered in Company A and Company B, discussion in this chapter follows the same pattern as Chapter 5, where survey findings from Company A were presented. Broader implications relating to the negotiating power between the employee and the employer, and the possibilities of long-term change in work-life policies are discussed in Chapter 8.

7.1 THE ORGANISATION

Company B is a large multinational telecommunications organisation employing nearly 55,000 employees world-wide, and has 5,000 employees in the UK. The survey was sent to 225 employees working in the head-office at one work-site. This site had 450 head-office employees and nearly the same number of manufacturing employees. Factory employees were not included in the survey. Since the total population was only 450, every second employee was selected. 128 completed questionnaires were received, making a response rate of 57 percent.

A few flexible working options were used at the work-site, although there were few formal policies guiding managers. Managers were interested in participating in the current study as they planned to expand the use of flexible working in the head-office, and may use this as a test-site.

7.2 THE SAMPLE

The achieved sample reflected the characteristics of the work-site population at which it was distributed. A brief description follows:

The sample was largely male, with only one-fourth of the respondents being female. The age distribution was unexceptional being spread as follows:

	<u>%</u>
≤ 20	nil
21-30	37
31-40	38
41-50	18
51-60	7
	<u>100</u>

Thirty-five percent had children, while only two percent were also responsible for elderly dependants at home. The full-picture of marital status (with and without children) was as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Single (without children)	31
Single (with children)	2
Traditional family (without children)	3
Traditional family (with children)	9
Dual career couples (without children)	31
Dual career couples (with children)	24
	<u>100</u>

Further analysis showed that there were only six women with children in the sample, which is not in proportion with the total percentage of females in the sample or with the overall percentage of employees who have children.

The sample was largely managerial and professional staff – the occupational groups present were as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Managers and senior administrators	22
Professionals	59
Associate professionals and Technicians	10
Clerical and Secretarial	9
	<u>100</u>

This was reflected in salary as follows:

	<u>%</u>
more than £40,000	18
£30,000 - £40,000	26
£20,000 - £30,000	48
£10,000 - £20,000	7
less than £10,000	1
	<u>100</u>

And in educational background as follows:

	<u>%</u>
Degree/Postgraduate degree/equivalent prof. qualifications	60
A level or equivalent/HND or NVQ 4	20
O level or equivalent/GCSE (grades A-C)/BTEC/NVQ level 3	19
No qualifications/CSE or equivalent/GCSE (grades D-G)	1
	<u>100</u>

The sample had some additional noteworthy associations. There was no significant difference in the income and educational levels of males and females. Gender was associated with occupational groups for the total sample (0.4231***). However, further analysis showed that this association was not reflected across all occupational groups. It existed among the associate professionals, who were predominantly male, and the secretarial staff, 82 percent of whom were female. No statistical differences were found on the basis of gender in the two key occupational groups. Twenty-five percent of managers and 19 percent of professionals were females, which is proportional to their representation in the sample.

Education and occupational groups were associated ($v=0.2961^{**}$), where managers and professional were more likely to be higher educated. A weak relationship was found between income and occupational groups ($v=0.2377^{*}$) but no patterns emerged from the crosstabulation tables. No association was found between education and income, probably because the sample was disproportionately constituted of high-status employees.

No association was found between gender and age. Whether a person had children or not was associated with gender ($v=0.1871^{*}$), with women less likely to have children in the achieved sample.

In summary, the sample lacked differences in status, and was largely composed of highly educated, managerial and professional staff. This was expected, since only head-office employees were surveyed. However, this characteristic can be taken as strength of the sample, since these employees are likely to have greater power to influence organisational policies. However, the small representation of females, particularly those with children, limits the study of influences of lifecycle stages of women on their desire for flexible working.

7.3 EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORKING

This section reports findings on employee attitudes towards flexible working. This question is central to the study, since employees' desire for flexible working is assumed to be one of the main reasons for the adoption and expansion of flexible working.

Positive employee attitudes towards flexible working would indicate increased pressure for companies to adopt flexible working. This pressure is more likely to increase in the future if a higher positive response comes from the new components of the changing demographics or from sub-groups with higher intra-organisational negotiating power.

However, as noted before, negative attitudes are also important, particularly if they indicate polarising of attitudes between employee groups, as this would have the effect of weakening the overall impact of employees' 'negotiating power', though a multiplicity of competing demands (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991).

The results show that employees consider flexible working to be a useful work-life policy, with 42 percent agreeing strongly and 35 percent agreeing moderately with the statement that flexible working could help them balance their work and personal life.

Support for flexible working is also reflected in employee response to three additional statements (Table 7.1) which ask about general employee attitudes towards flexibility as a means to facilitate better balance between work and life. The strongest agreement

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Flexible working options are a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities	46	41	12	-	1
Flexible working options should be made available to all employees in the organisation	42	25	14	10	9
Family-friendly policies should be expanded to make them employee-friendly policies	35	25	36	3	1

Table 7.1: Flexible working and family friendly policies (%)

(87 percent strongly or moderately agreeing) was in response to the use of flexible working to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities. Positive response to all the questions covered indicates the probability of increased demand for flexible working practices in the future.

Negative response to these statements, which is also extremely important, is small, except in reply to one statement – ‘*Flexible working options should be made available to all employees in the organisation*’. Nineteen percent of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Interestingly, almost none of these people disagree that flexible working is a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities. Thus, a group of people believes that non-flexible working is the standard way to work, and flexible working is a benefit which should be offered to only a few. One of the respondents explained:

I agree that there should be a balance between work and home. However, that is a personal decision....Saying life is unfair and the employer should do something about it is bull! However, there should be protection for the

disadvantaged in the workplace. (31-40 years old, married, professional, male with no dependant children)

Further analysis of the statement *'flexible working should be made available to all employees in the organisation'* showed that women were more likely to agree ($t=3.33^{***}$). More importantly, significant differences existed between occupational groups ($F=2.87^*$), with managers most likely to disagree with this statement, and professionals most likely to agree with it. Both these groups are likely to have higher intra-organisational negotiating power. While managers are more likely to be directly involved in policy making, 'professionals' are the key workers in Company B (which operates in the telecommunications sector). Thus, there appears to be a conflict of interest between two powerful groups in the organisation. However, it is also possible that the managers had the manufacturing plant or other work-sites in mind, and there may be no conflict in expanding use of flexible working at head-office.

The above results, of difference in attitudes on the basis of occupational groups and gender, were analysed further by elaborating each of the bivariate relationship by introducing the third variable as a control. The difference between gender continues to exist in all except the 'professional' occupational group. Thus, while differences existed between male and female managerial and secretarial staff ($t=2.25^*$ and $t=3.43^{**}$ respectively), no difference existed between the opinion of male and female professionals ($t=1.1$). In the total sample, since professionals were more likely to agree that flexibility should be made available to all, the interpretation from the above findings are that male professionals are more likely to agree than males belonging to other occupational groups. The alternative interpretation, which would be that female professionals were less likely to agree, was not accepted.

When the analysis for difference between occupational groups was carried out controlling for gender, differences continued to exist between men ($F=4.08^{**}$), where managers were most likely to disagree, as in the original relationship. However difference were not found among females. Thus, while conflict of interest between two powerful groups – managers and professionals – exists, as interpreted earlier, there is a further difference of opinion between male and female managers. Thus, increasing

representation of women managers in the workforce may result in greater development of family-friendly organisational structure and working practices.

Analysis also showed limited influence of lifecycle stages on attitudes towards flexible working, though the evidence was not as strong as was anticipated. No differences were found on the basis of gender, childcare responsibilities and household status (particularly dual-career couples) towards the statement that flexible working could help them balance their work and personal lives. Also, no differences were found when specific comparisons were made between dual career fathers and fathers from ‘traditional’ families, and between women with or without children. While findings showing greater usefulness of flexibility for the demographic sub-groups whose proportion is on the increase (namely women, women with children, dual career couples/fathers or the younger age-groups) was likely to support the argument that workforce of the future is more likely to desire flexibility, the absence of this finding was balanced by a high positive response from all employees. This positive response is also considered to be a major reason for absence of findings. Thus, the pressure to provide flexibility is likely to come from all employees not just selected sub-groups.

In response to a separate statement, dual career couples were more likely to think that flexible working was a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities (Table 7.2). Thus, there is some indication of a greater positive attitude of newer demographic groups towards flexibility. However, this finding should be viewed keeping in mind that no differences were found among gender, age, or childcare responsibilities in response to this statement.

	Mean
	F=3.35**
Single without children	2.08
Single with children	2.00
‘Traditional family’ without children	2.00
‘Traditional family’ with children	1.75
Dual career family without children	1.46
Dual career family with children	1.48

Table 7.2: Comparison of six households
(ANOVA results; lower value shows greater conflict; range 1-5; F=F-ratio)

In summary, there was a high desire for flexible working, and limited evidence was found linking the new demographic sub-groups (women, and dual career couples) to desire for more flexibility. Thus, the organisation is likely to face increased pressure to provide flexible working, especially since little evidence was found to indicate competing demands, although there might be some conflict between the attitudes of managers and professionals.

7.4 HOW DIFFERENT GROUPS PERCEIVE FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

This section aims to uncover the desirability of particular flexible working options, and to understand any differences between groups based on personal and work-related characteristics.

Three aspects surrounding flexible working practices were explored – availability, use, and desirability. ‘Availability’ refers to the perceived existence of organisational policies, ‘use’ reflects individuals’ response to organisational policies, and desirability indicates whether employees would like to have the option. The flexible working practices studied fall into two categories:

- (i) **flexible work options** (flexi-time, compressed work-weeks, home-working, part-time working, term-time working, job-sharing, voluntarily reduced time), and
- (ii) **extended leave options** (maternity, paternity, sabbaticals and career breaks).

In addition to personal and work-related characteristics, responses of the newer components of the workforce were also analysed – that is, groups whose proportion in the workforce is increasing, namely, women, women with young children, and dual career couples. While it was also the intention to include lone parents, and those with elderly dependant care responsibilities among the newer components of the workforce, this was not possible due to the sample size, and the small representation of these groups in the sample.

7.4.1 Flexible work options

Details of use, availability and desirability of flexible work options in Company B are presented in Table 7.3¹. As the Table shows, flexitime was the only widely used and widely available option in the organisation (43 percent), although at least one form of flexibility was perceived to be available to 66 percent of the respondents. Desirability, the last column, shows the percentage of respondents (calculated on the denominator of the whole sample) who were neither using that form of flexibility, nor had it been made available to them, but who would like it to be made available. The percentages reported in this column indicate a large, unfulfilled demand from employees. Company policies and what employees desired differed most widely in relation to flexi-time, compressed work weeks, and home-working. It should be noted that all these provide flexibility within a full-time working contract, and do not involve any time-income trade-off. Nevertheless, the first option that involves such a trade-off – term-time working – is desired by 21 percent of the sample, and is currently not available in the organisation.

	Use (%)	Perceived availability (%)	Desirability (%)
Flexi-time	43	59	32
Home-working (p/t)	5	9	47
Compressed work weeks	5	8	39
Part-time	2	6	11
Job-sharing	1	1	7
Home-working (f/t)	1	1	38
Term time working	-	-	21
Voluntary reduced time	-	2	16
Total (excl. double counting)	47	66	76

Table 7.3: Flexible work options
Base: All employees (n=128)

The overall popularity of an option among employees can be gauged by the sum of use and desirability (Figure 7.1), though the results from this addition may be methodologically less reliable. This sum shows that, not surprisingly, flexitime was the most popular option. More revealing was the popularity of home-working and compressed work weeks.

¹ See footnote of Section 5.5.1 to understand how Table 7.3 was derived.

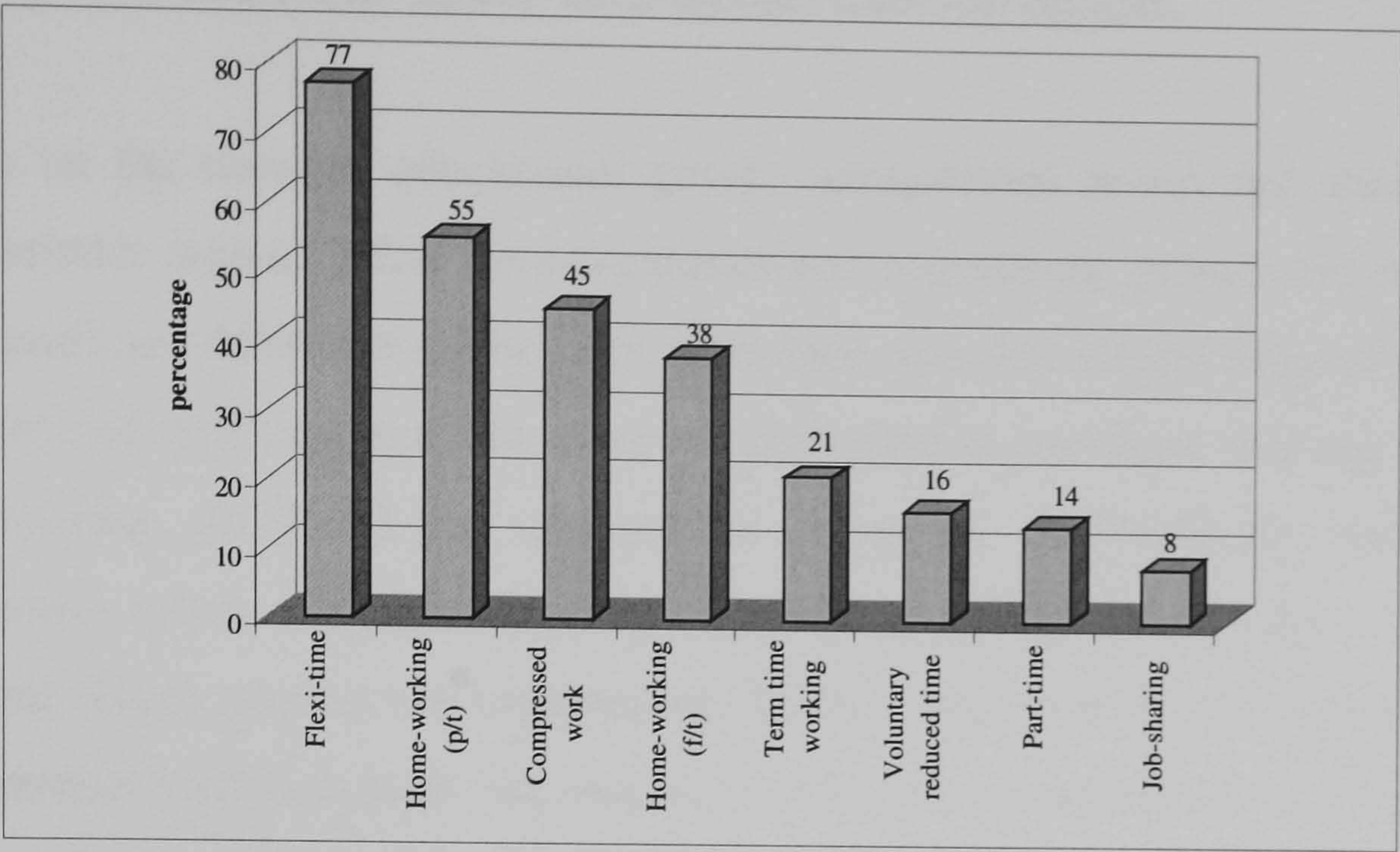


Figure 7.1: Popularity of flexible working options

Differences between sub-groups: This sub-section reports findings on association between desirability of or lack of interest in flexible work options and gender, age, childcare responsibilities, household status, education level, occupational groups and income levels. While it was the aim to analyse differences in sub-groups in use and perceived availability as well, this analysis could only be carried out for flexitime, since it was the only options used by and available to a reasonable proportion of individuals.

In reporting findings in this section, reduced time flexibility options are combined since their analysis showed similar results. Not surprisingly, women were more likely to show a greater interest in options that involve a time-income trade-off. This interest is reflected in a greater desire for part-time working, job-sharing, and voluntary reduced time (Table 7.4). Comparing these three options, men showed greatest interest in voluntary

	Desire for part-time working	Desire for job-sharing	Desire for voluntary reduced time	Desire for term-time working
	v=0.361***	v=0.2012*	v=0.242**	N.S.
Men (n=97)	5%	4%	11%	19%
Women (n=31)	32	16	32	29

Table 7.4: Men and women’s desire for options involving time-income trade-offs (Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V)

reduced time. Also, 19 percent of men desired term-time working. Thus, men are showing greater interest in 'newer' time-income trade-off options.

Analysis on the basis of educational group, occupational group and annual income (characteristics which define intra-organisational negotiating power) did not produce many significant differences. The only difference was that almost none of the clerical and secretarial staff said that they were not interested in part-time working (0.3056**) or job-sharing (0.292**) as opposed to managers, professionals and associate professionals, where the percentages of those not interested varied from 43 percent to 68 percent. There may be two explanations for this. First, a large proportion of clerical and secretarial staff is female. Second, there may be a perception that managerial and professional jobs cannot be performed on a part-time and/or job-share basis (as discussed Chapter 5 and 6), in which case, practical incompatibilities need to be differentiated from perceived ones.

No significant differences were found in responses to full-time flexible work options, probably because the sample had few variations on the basis of personal and work-related characteristics. However, this absence of results highlights the popularity of full-time flexible working options among employees of both genders, all ages and different types of households. It also shows that such options, which were more popular than reduced time options (Table 7.3), were desired by high-status employees as the sample was disproportionately made up of the latter, and that within the sample achieved, status was not found to influence the use and perceived availability of flexitime.

7.4.2 Extended leave options

Table 7.5 shows the availability and desirability of extended leave options in Company B (the percentages of both perceived availability and desirability are calculated on the denominator of the whole sample). Paternity and extended maternity leave (beyond legislative requirements) were available to nearly half the sample. Sabbaticals and career breaks were perceived to be available by only a few, but desired by 38 percent and 42 percent respectively.

	Perceived availability (%)	Desirability (%)	Availability + Desirability (%)
Paternity	48	9	57
Extended maternity leave*	42	5	47
Sabbaticals	6	38	44
Career breaks	5	42	47

Table 7.5: Extended leave options (*n=31, only females)
Base: All employees (n=128)

Differences between sub-groups: Responses to perceived availability of extended leave options were analysed for differences between sub-groups. The same procedure was repeated for desirability for extended leave. Perceived availability could only be analysed for paternity and maternity leave, while desirability was analysed for sabbatical and career breaks only. The remaining categories had a small proportion of positive responses, and thus it was not possible to analyse them further. This subsection reports differences on the basis of gender, age, childcare responsibilities, household status, educational level, occupational groups and income levels.

No differences were found in perceived availability of maternity and paternity leave. Thus, status was not found to influence availability of these policies. In analysing differences in desire for sabbaticals and career breaks, a relationship was found between education and the desire for sabbaticals and career breaks – the higher the educational qualifications of the individual, the greater the possibility that they desire these options (Table 7.6). Thus, expanding availability of these extended leave options may retain the highly educated.

	Sabbatical	Career break
	Would like to have sabbaticals available	Would like to have career break available
Education		
Degree, postgraduate degree, prof. qualifications	49%	53%
A level or equivalent, HND, NVQ 4	39	39
O-levels, GCSE (A-C), BTEC , NVQ 3	17	25
	v=0.251*	v=0.2233*

Table 7.6: Differences in desirability of extended leave options
(Cross-tabulation results; all figures percentages with Cramer’s V)
Base: All employees (n=128)

The desirability of sabbaticals ($v=0.2233^{**}$) and career breaks ($v=0.1745^{*}$) is also higher among those without children. This indicates that those without children see sabbaticals as more practical, or that they have a particular attitude towards career.

No difference was found between genders or on the basis of age. Further analysis was carried out to explore the relationships between sabbaticals and career breaks, and education and childcare responsibilities by rerunning the above tests, controlling for gender. The results for females were not statistically reliable (as the cells with expected frequency of less than five were greater than 20 percent). For males, the value of Cramer's V is not significantly affected (none of the changes in V value were greater than 0.04) but the significance level drops lower than 95 percent for three out of the four associations. The association between childcare responsibilities and desire for sabbatical (0.2147^{*}) is replicated for men within desirable statistical limits.

Thus, it is argued that gender was not found to explain the original relationships. These original relationships were on the margins of statistical acceptability and thus further division of the sample affected significance. Thus, it is concluded that weak relationships existed between the discussed extended leave options, and childcare and education for the achieved sample, which may be explored in further studies.

7.4.3 Absence of results

The preceding sections have discussed differences between sub-groups on the basis of gender, age, childcare responsibility, household status, education levels, occupational groups and income levels. There were additional items in the questionnaire, which formed sub-groups for analysis, which have been suggested by other studies as having significant influence on the desire for flexibility. However, no relationship was found between increase or decrease in general stress, workload and responsibilities, and the desire for flexible work or extended leave options. Similarly, experiences of redundancy or unemployment did not form the basis of any significant differences. Thus, changes experienced at work were not related to the desire for flexibility in the present study. Reasons for the absence of these results have been discussed in Section 5.5.3.

7.4.4 Summary

The key findings on flexible working options are as follows;

- A large majority of employees desire (more) flexibility.
- Flexible working options that allow flexibility within a full-time contract are more popular than options that involve a reduction in working time.
- Traditional time-income trade-off options of part-time working and job-sharing were desired more by women, but the difference between genders was less marked in the attraction of newer options (voluntary reduced time and term-time working).
- Compatibility of part-time working with managerial and professional jobs needs to be explored further.
- A weak association was found between the higher educated and desire for sabbaticals and career breaks.
- Changes at work were not found to be linked to a desire for flexibility.

Only a few differences were found on the basis of characteristics which define intra-organisational negotiating power. However, because of the way this sample was selected, it lacks variation in status, and largely consists of highly educated, managerial and professional staff. This can explain the absence of differences on the basis of these characteristics. However, due to its composition, the overall opinion of this sample is likely to be of greater value in understanding the interests of those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power.

7.5 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

This section aims to understand if changing demographics or working practices are likely to result in an increase in work-family conflict, and if this conflict can be reduced by using flexible working practices. Some negative effects of work-family conflict were also explored.

If higher work-family conflict is reported by the newer demographic components of the workforce, and those working longer hours and experiencing increase in stress,

workload and responsibilities, it will indicate that changing demographics and working practices may increase work-family conflict. On the other hand, if those making use of flexible work practices report less work-family conflict, it will be tempting to justify the use of such practices. Finally, a negative relationship between work-family conflict, and satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation will highlight the adverse impact of neglecting the work-life balance of employees.

Most researchers agree that (i) the general demands of a role, (ii) the time devoted to a given role, and (iii) the strain produced by a given role are domain elements of work-family conflict. The questionnaire provided statements on each of these three dimensions. The results (Table 7.7) show that 44 percent of the sample strongly or moderately agreed that they faced general work-family conflict.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The demands of my work interfere with my home and personal/family life	20	24	30	14	12
The amount of <i>time</i> my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities	10	14	32	28	16
My job produces <i>strain</i> that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties	9	18	30	23	20

Table 7.7: Work-family conflict (%)

However, for the latter two statements, which measure time-based and strain-based conflict, the percentage of those who disagree is higher. Comments by an employee best explain this response:

I feel Company B has a very positive attitude towards balancing people’s needs outside work and the needs of the business..... The company does not demand or expect me to work outside my hours, and with organisation and time management, I rarely find it is necessary in order to effectively do my job.
 (31-40 years old, married, female, professional, without children, working 39 hours/week including unpaid overtime)

Changing demographics and work-family conflict: Analysis on the basis of demographics did not result in many significant differences. The variables which

formed the basis of sub-group analysis were gender, childcare responsibilities and household status. Based on desk research, some specific comparisons were made. In these tests no differences were on the basis of the age of the youngest child, number of children, or when specific comparisons were made between traditional fathers and dual career fathers.

Comparisons were not made between fathers and mothers, since the total sample had only six mothers (total sample n=128). Since return of women from maternity leave, and their long-term retention, is one of the problems faced by Company B, perhaps it can be said that those who had (perceived) higher conflict between their work and personal lives, had already left the company.

The absence of differences is contrary to our initial assumptions and the findings of other researchers. There may be an explanation for this. The scale used in the current study measures flow of conflict from work to family and not vice-versa. Other researchers have used scales that measure the flow in both directions. Demanding personal circumstances, which form the basis of demographic sub-grouping (e.g. young children at home), may be more likely to generate family-work conflict rather than work-family conflict.

Employees with higher negotiating power and work-family conflict: Additional analysis of work-family conflict statements however showed significant differences between occupational groups on two of the three scales (Table 7.8). Mean values (lower values) show that managers and senior administrators experienced the highest work-life conflict on all three scales, followed by professionals.

	General conflict	Time-based conflict	Strain-based conflict
	F=3.72**	F=4.43**	N.S.
	mean	mean	mean
Managers and senior administrators	2.18	2.61	2.89
Professionals	2.81	3.37	3.29
Associate professionals and Technicians	2.92	3.75	3.92
Clerical and Secretarial	3.55	3.64	3.64

Table 7.8: Work-family conflict by occupational groups
(ANOVA results; lower value shows greater conflict; range 1-5; F= F-ratio)

To confirm that the response of managers differed significantly from others, t-tests were carried out between managers and all other individuals grouped together (Table 7.8b). Significant differences existed across all three scales. Repeating this analysis while controlling for gender showed that the difference between general conflict findings was specific to female managers. However, both male and female managers were more likely to face greater time-based conflict.

	General conflict	Time-based conflict	Strain-based conflict
Total sample (n=128)	t=2.73**	t=3.45***	t=1.98*
Men (n=97)	1.68	2.74**	1.23
Women (n=31)	2.67**	2.14*	1.76

Table 7.8b: Work-family conflict for managers vs. non-managers
(t-test results showing t-value)

Thus, managers are more likely to face greater conflict, though gender influences result. Since the negative effects of work-family conflict are well researched, organisations should perhaps pay more attention to a better work-life balance for their key managerial (and professional) employees.

Significant differences also existed in response to the general work-family conflict statement on the basis of annual income ($F=3.44^{**}$) – the higher the income bracket, the higher was the reported conflict.

Thus, there was evidence to support the statement that those with higher intra-organisational negotiating power are likely to face greater conflict. Since the negative effects of work-family conflict are well researched, organisations should perhaps pay more attention to a better work-life balance of these key employees. It is worth exploring further whether or not these employees with higher intra-organisational negotiating power have been able to use their power to improve their work-life balance, and if not, then why?

Changes at work and work-family conflict: Anticipated relationships between changes at work and work-family conflict were supported by the analysis. Length of hours worked correlated with higher conflict (-0.4868^{***} for general work-family

conflict, -0.3668*** for time-based conflict, and -0.3428*** for strain based conflict). Thus, it is inferred that long hours and presentism culture adversely affect personal/family lives.

In addition to the number of hours worked each week, the questionnaire also asked whether the individual had experienced an increase in stress, working hours, or responsibilities over the last five years. Those who reported an increase in working hours and stress were likely to report higher work-family conflict on all three scales (Table 7.9).

	Increased stress	Increased working hours
General work-family conflict	0.2484**	0.2934***
Time based work-family conflict	0.3267***	0.2734**
Strain based work-family conflict	0.3254***	0.2635**

Table 7.9: Correlations between work-family conflict and increase in stress and working hours.

Effects of work-family conflict: The negative effects of work-family conflict are well documented. Self-reported satisfaction with work, and commitment to the organisation in this study are correlated with work-family conflict statements. The results (Table 7.10) show that the anticipated relationships existed. In particular, those who felt that their job produced strain that made it difficult to fulfil family duties (strain-related conflict) were significantly more likely to report lower satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation. However, these results should be interpreted with caution, since the associations are based on cross-sectional data.

	Satisfaction with work	Commitment to the organisation
General work-family conflict	-0.1816*	-0.1385
Time based work-family conflict	-0.1856*	-0.1374
Strain based work-family conflict	-0.3080***	-0.2077**

Table 7.10: Correlations between conflict, satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation.

Flexible working and work-family conflict: Flexitime was the only widely used flexible working option in the organisation, used by 43 percent of the sample. T-tests to confirm that users of flexi-time reported lower work-family conflict, did not produce any significant results, however. This was probably because use of flexi-time was informal, and margins of flexibility varied widely between employees, being completely at the discretion of line managers.

Working atmosphere in the organisation and work-family conflict: In addition to flexible working policies, informal flexibility through a supportive working atmosphere is also likely to enable workers to balance their work and personal life. Four statements were included in the questionnaire to test this:

1. *The organisation actively promotes policies on flexible working*
2. *Managers are understanding about employees having to meet personal/family responsibilities*
3. *Supervisors/managers would juggle schedules, tasks or duties to accommodate my personal/family responsibilities*
4. *Peers are understanding about my having to meet personal/family responsibilities*

A number of negative relationships were found between these four items and the three scales of work-family conflict (Table 7.11). Thus, those who thought that the organisation actively promoted policies on flexible working, or whose managers, supervisors and peers were understanding about their personal/family responsibilities,

	Supportive organisational policies	Supportive managers	Supportive supervisors	Supportive peers
General work-family conflict	-0.1927*	-0.2251**	-0.2755**	-0.2348**
Time-based work-family conflict	-0.0834	-0.2212**	-0.2137*	-0.1506
Strain-based work-family conflict	-0.1198	-0.2155**	-0.1812*	-0.1731

Table 7.11: Correlations between working atmosphere and work-family conflict

were likely to report lower conflict. The correlations with managers and supervisors was found to be the strongest, and existed across all three scales. Accepting that the

empirical analysis does not establish causal relationships, these questions were researched to establish whether work-life balance could be improved by a family-friendly atmosphere. Findings can be interpreted as supporting this, particularly emphasising the role of managers in enabling employees to create a better balance.

Thus, informal policies and a family friendly organisational culture can improve work-life balance of the employees.

Partial correlations:

The zero order correlations of Table 7.9, 7.10 and 7.11 were analysed further to study how much of the relationship remains after the contribution of selected variables has been removed or partialled out. Three test variables were selected – gender, occupational groups and working hours. While gender has been the basis of comparison groups throughout the study, differences in the attitudes of managers towards work-life questions provided the argument to partial out their contribution to these responses. The nominal variable of occupational groups was recoded as a dichotomous variable for this analysis – the two groups were managers vs. all other occupations. The associations between long-working hours and the three conflict scales, as well as other dependent variables (e.g. increase in stress) justified its use as the third test variable. The criteria to judge whether the conditional relationships were substantially lower than the initial relationship was a difference of at least 0.1 between the two.

All four significant correlations of Table 7.10 are replicated when the contributions of gender, managerial occupation groups and working hours are partialled out. A fifth partial correlation, between time based conflict and commitment to the organisation becomes statistically significant (0.1961* as opposed to the original 0.1374) but the difference in value is not substantially higher.

Of the eight significant relationships of Table 7.11, six are replicated. For the remaining two – the partial relationships between ‘supportive supervisors’ and time- and strain-based conflict – the confidence interval drops lower than 95%, but the values are not substantially lower. Thus, the finding that family friendly working atmosphere may reduce conflict on the work-family interface remains intact. However, partial correlations show that for this data set, the relationship between managerial

understanding of the employees’ work-life needs and conflict scales is more robust than the relationship between conflict and supervisors’ willingness to juggle tasks and schedules.

Four of the six relationships of Table 7.9 were not replicated when the contribution of gender, managerial group and working hours were partialled out simultaneously. Further analysis showed that gender or occupational groups did not influence the partial relationship – it was effected by working hours. Table 7.12 shows the zero-order relationships of Table 7.9 and the first-order partial relationships after the contribution of working hours has been removed.

		Increased stress	Increased working hours
General work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.2484**	0.2934***
	partial	0.1355	0.1349
Time based work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.3267***	0.2734**
	Partial	0.2461**	0.1523
Strain based Work-family conflict	Zero-order	0.3254***	0.2635**
	Partial	0.2493**	0.1494

Table 7.12: Zero- and first-order correlations with working hours as the test variable

Table 7.12 shows that the relationship between conflict and employees’ perception of increase in working hours was spurious. Working hours and perception of increase in working hours were correlated (0.3675***), as were working hours and the conflict scales, as discussed earlier. For the relationships with increase in stress with conflict, one of the three relationships is substantially lower (a difference of more than 0.1). However, the remaining two are also influenced. Based on all three findings, it is concluded that there is a relationship between work-family conflict and increase in stress. However, this relationship is influenced by the length of hours worked by the individual (partially spurious). Thus, if causal interpretations are made on the basis of these associations, an individual working longer hours is more likely to observe (an increase in) work-family conflict if s/he experiences increase in stress.

Summary: The key findings from this section on work-family conflict are as follows;

- No evidence was found to link the new demographic components of the workforce with higher work-family conflict.

- Managers (especially female managers) and professionals suffered from greatest work-family conflict among the occupational groups.
- Higher income groups suffered from greater work-family conflict.
- Longer working hours and increasing stress are associated with higher conflict.
- Higher work-family conflict is correlated with lower work satisfaction and lower commitment to the organisation.
- A family-friendly working atmosphere in the organisation may reduce conflict on the work-family interface.

Results reported in this section may mark a permanent or temporary change in work-family conflict observed by employees. For example, findings relating to managers and professionals mark a permanent change, since these professions are on the increase. On the other hand, long working hours and increasing stress may be a temporary or permanent feature of work, and hence their effects may be short- or long-term. Nevertheless, the associations found are helpful in understanding how work affects family, especially in times of change.

7.6 BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING AMONG THOSE CURRENTLY MAKING USE OF IT

This section aims to understand the possible benefits of flexible working reported by individuals who are using flexibility. A strong positive response would reinforce the use of flexibility in general as a work-life policy. In addition, differences between groups based on personal and work-related characteristics may provide insight into which employee groups find flexibility more useful, and why others were less likely to do so. Results reported in this section may be influenced by employees' desire to report benefits, in order to retain or increase use and availability.

A list of benefits was provided to find out if individuals agreed with these. Respondents, who were either users of flexible working or said that it was available to them, reported extremely positive results on its use or availability (Figure 7.2). The results were more absolute for benefits to the individual and their family, although benefits for work were also extremely high.

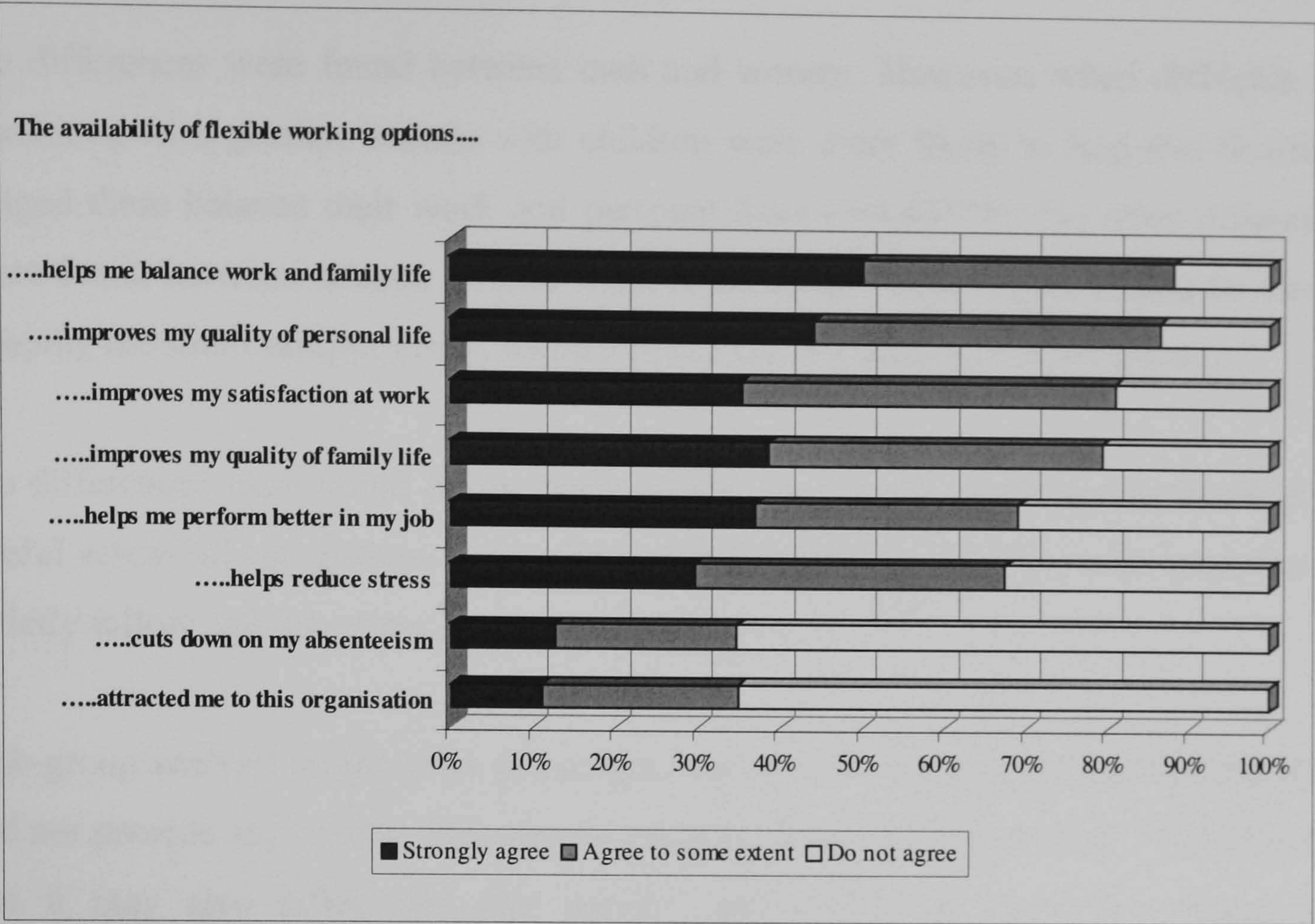


Figure 7.2: Effects of flexible working (n=104)

Significant differences were found in the analysis of benefits for quality of life and employee groups based on lifecycle variables (Table 7.13). Married respondents and those with children were more likely to find flexibility useful. Since the sample had only a few women with children, the finding that those with children found flexibility

	Balance work and family life	Improve quality of family life	Improve quality of personal life
Married versus single	t=3.43***	t=3.82***	t=2.61**
Those with children versus those without children	3.73***	2.45*	N.S.

Table 7.13: Differences in benefits of flexible working
(T-test results showing t-value)

useful in fact shows that fathers find flexibility helpful. Further t-tests analysing the responses of men only support this. Results show that men with children were more likely to find that flexibility helped them balance their work and personal lives (t=3.14**) and improved their quality of personal life (t=2.02*). However, no difference was found between fathers from ‘traditional’ families and fathers in dual-career families.

No differences were found between men and women. However, when childcare was combined with gender, women with children were more likely to find that flexibility helped them balance their work and personal lives ($t=4.44^{***}$). No other differences were found between women with or without children. These results should be viewed keeping the small sample size of women ($n=25$ for this analysis) in perspective.

No differences were found on the basis of age, once again stressing that flexibility is useful across all age-groups, and perhaps also highlighting how lifecycle stages do not strictly follow age-groupings in the modern society.

Sub-group analysis on the basis of occupational groups, income, and educational levels did not provide any results. This may be partially because of the sample characteristics, but it may also reflect the true positive perceptions of employees across such characteristics. Further, the positive effects reported by this high-status sample, considering that the organisation was in the initial stages of offering flexibility, can be an indication of the potential of flexible working as a work-life policy that benefits both the organisation and the individual. On the other hand, employees may have reported positive benefits to increase the availability of flexibility. However, as the reported self-benefits were higher than the reported organisational benefits, this seems less likely.

In summary, providing flexible work options improves the home and professional lives of the workforce. Limited evidence supported that personal benefits are highest for married individuals, and those with children.

7.7 FACTORS LIKELY TO INFLUENCE THE NEGOTIATING POWER OF EMPLOYEES

This section analyses the survey questions on negotiating power. Three factors were considered to influence power of the employee:

- (i) work-related characteristics that define centrality and difficulty in substitutability
- (ii) willingness to trade time for income
- (iii) readiness to vote with the feet

The following sub-sections report summary findings on these three questions, as well as the results of sub-group analysis based on gender, age, childcare responsibilities, household status, education, income and occupational groups.

7.7.1 Work-related characteristics that define centrality and difficulty in substitutability

Four statements were included in the questionnaire to measure centrality and substitutability of the person and their skills. No differences were found in the analysis of the statements on centrality. Significant differences existed between sub-groups in response to the two statements on substitutability (Table 7.14). Corresponding mean values showed that those with higher educational qualifications and those in higher income groups were most likely to think that they and their skills were not easily replaceable. This finding justifies and reinforces the use of education and annual income as categories defining intra-organisational negotiating power. No significant differences were found in the response of occupational groups, most probably because the sample largely consisted of managers and professionals (81 percent).

	Educational groups	Income groups
I am easily replaceable	F=3.29*	F=4.19**
My skills are easily replaceable	F=3.27*	N.S.

Table 7.14: Work-related characteristics defining intra-organisational negotiating power
(ANOVA results; F=F-ratio)

None of the personal characteristics influenced self-perception of centrality and difficulty in substitutability.

7.7.2 Willingness to trade time for income

In assuming that willingness to trade pay for reduced working time can be taken as an indicator of stronger needs and/or a higher desire for a better work-life balance, two questions were included in the questionnaire:

- 1. Would flexible working options that involve a trade-off between hours worked and income be attractive to you?*
- 2. If you had a choice, would you trade-off a proportion of your pay for more free time?*

Forty-nine percent of respondents were interested in at least one of the flexible working options involving a trade-off between hours worked and income, and 32 percent were ready to trade-off a proportion of their pay for more free time. These percentages are surprisingly high if we keep the composition of the sample in mind, since 81 percent of the respondents were managers or professionals. Thus, individuals working in these occupations can be interested in reducing their working time and taking pay cuts for a better balance. No differences were found between sub-groups on the basis of work-related characteristics.

Other characteristics of the sample, which increase the significance of interest in time-income trade-offs, are that three-quarters of the sample was male, and only 5 percent were women with children. Thus, it appears that reduced time working was desired for reasons other than for childcare by mothers. Although women showed greater interest in reduced hours flexible working options ($v=0.1695^*$), as well as in trading-off pay for free time ($v=0.2192^{**}$), no differences were found on the basis of childcare responsibilities. This absence of differences continued to exist when gender was introduced as a control variable in childcare analysis. Thus, women with or without children were equally likely to be interested in willingness to trade time for income.

7.7.3 Readiness to vote with their feet

The ultimate negotiating power of employees comes from their readiness to 'vote with their feet'. With this in mind, respondents were given a list of choices and asked to select one of the alternatives only (Table 7.15). The results should be viewed critically, since individuals who were (more) dissatisfied may have left the organisation, as is indicated by a small proportion of women with children in the achieved sample.

Sixty-four percent of the respondents said that they would take action if their organisation was not prepared to help them achieve their desired work-life balance. The

most popular response was ‘leaving for a similar job with better work-life benefits’ (31 percent). ‘Becoming self-employed’ was selected by 11 percent, which reflects the proportion of professionals and associate professionals in the sample, since they are more able to become self-employed. Selection of self-employment also highlights employees’ perception that working for oneself can improve work-life balance.

If your organisation is not ready to facilitate you in achieving work-life balance, which of the options given below would you choose?	(%)
Do nothing about it	36
Leave for another similar job (but better work-life benefits)	31
Start looking for another job	17
Leave for a flexible job for which you are over-qualified	3
Become self-employed	11
Leave work/ paid work	-
Others (please tick and specify)	2

Table 7.15: How employees will respond to achieve their desired work-life balance

Thirty-one percent of respondents would like to leave for a similar job with better work-life benefits. However, only one-third of all respondents in a separate question were aware of work-life options available in other organisations. This proportion applies also to the 31 percent who say they would leave for another job with better work-life benefits, indicating that their response is based more on desirability than factual information.

Analysis of sub-groups did not reveal any differences. This is not surprising since the list of possible responses strongly varied in the nature of alternatives they offered. A significantly larger sample would have made it possible to explore associations between each of the individual response, and personal and work-related characteristics.

Overall, a clear majority of employees are prepared to leave the organisation, which should be a concern to any employer.

7.7.4 Summary

The key findings from this section are as follows:

- Higher educational groups, and higher income groups are likely to have greater intra-organisational negotiating power due to difficulty in their substitutability.
- Personal characteristics of the individual were not found to influence self-perception of centrality and difficulty in substitutability.
- A high level of interest was shown in trading income for free time.
- Since the sample is largely composed of male managers and professionals, interest shown in time-income trade-off options appears exceptionally high.
- Women are more likely to be interested in time-income trade-off options and in trading off their pay for free time, which may increase their negotiating power.
- A large proportion of employees were ready to vote with their feet to achieve their desired work-life balance.

Thus, findings from this section indicate that work-life balance is important to employees and they are prepared to make sacrifices and take actions to achieve this balance. Perhaps this is the reason that organisations are showing greater interest in the issue. However, the findings in this section should also be viewed critically, as there may be substantial difference between employees saying something and doing it. It is possible that the latent demand expressed by employees, for expanding their choice in organisational policy in the future, may not translate into actual demand.

7.8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A large proportion of employees in Company B desire flexible working and believe that it can help them balance their work and home life. However, a group of employees, which consisted disproportionately of managers, believed that flexibility should not be made available to all employees in the organisation. Since managers are responsible for designing and implementing policies, their opinion on flexible working is likely to influence its use. However, other occupational groups, particularly professionals, desire flexibility for all in the organisation. Thus, a conflict may exist between management and key employee sub-groups.

No additional contradictions were found in employee attitudes towards flexible working. Such polarisation, if present, may have the effect of weakening the potency of

pressure upon management to provide flexibility. In the absence of this, pressure upon management is likely to be stronger (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). and thus results largely support H4.

Some results indicated that newer demographic sub-groups had a greater desire for flexible working and were likely to find it more beneficial [H1]. Women and dual career couples were more likely to say that flexible working could help them balance their work and personal lives. Dual career couples were most likely to agree that flexible working was a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities.

The most desired flexible working options were those which allow flexibility within a full-time contract (flexi-time, compressed work-week and home-working). Term-time working was the most popular option that involved a reduction in working time and pay (desired by 21 percent). No differences existed in the popularity of this between men and women. Eleven percent men were also interested in voluntary reduced time, thus indicating that men are also interested in reduced time working, and contradicting the assumption that such flexibility is only desired by women. Part-time working and job-sharing were, however, desired by a very small proportion of men. Women were significantly more likely to desire these options. Perhaps barriers against men's desire to select the traditional options are partly psychological, since these options have been used by women for a long time. After all, men were interested in the 'newer' reduced time options.

Since most women in the sample did not have any children, the desirability of reduced working time by women may be for reasons other than childcare. However, it is also possible that they want flexibility, especially reduced hours flexibility, for the future, when they decide to have children. A respondent, who was not using flexibility, but who was interested in part-time working, home-working, term-time working, extended maternity leave and career-breaks for the future wrote:

Although at the present time I have very little commitment outside work, this is likely to change in the next five years, if and when I decide to have a family.
(31-40 years old, married, professional, female, with postgraduate degree)

At the same time, the varied lifestyles, particularly of young professionals, these days means that some of the reasons people have are 'untraditional'. Nevertheless, they may be equally powerful in influencing employee behaviour.

I would like more time to enjoy life, go snowboarding, clubbing and sleep till 1 p.m. I guess that is slightly more frivolous than looking after an elderly dependant, but just as important to me. Unfortunately most companies don't see it this way. (21-30 years old, single, professional, male)

I am studying M.Sc. by distance learning and have to use my annual leave to attend university. I would like my organisation to allow study days to attend university. (41-50 years old, single, professional, male)

Such attitudes could help explain the absence of results on the basis of age – the study found no difference in desire for flexibility on this basis [H1c]. Thus different age groups may use the time or autonomy created through flexibility according to personal preferences and lifecycle stages.

In exploring power through the ability to act, women were more likely to be interested in time-income trade-off options and were also more likely to trade-off a proportion of their pay for more free time [H3]. While the answers to these statements represents a latent demand, the fact that part-time workers were women (part-time work was not encouraged in this organisation), and that there were only a few working mothers in the sample, indicates that women/mothers were trying to use their negotiating power.

In this organisation, where the sample was predominately high-status, education and income groups were partially found to influence self-perception of difficulty in replaceability [H2a]. However, within the sample the higher educated, higher income, managers and professionals were not found to receive any preferential treatment in the use or availability of flexitime, the only widely available flexible working option. However, managers, professionals and associate professionals were less likely to desire part-time working and job-sharing. Thus the data did not provide support for H2 in Company B. The reasons for the lower interest of the more influential employees in

reduced time working options need to be studied further to find out if this is for personal reasons, or if they perceive it to be incompatible with their jobs. If the latter, further research should also aim to differentiate between actual and ideological incompatibility of high-level jobs with reduced time working.

No difference was found in work-family conflict among men and women, which is consistent with the findings of other researchers (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992, 1997). However, childcare responsibilities were also not found to affect work-family conflict, contrary to the findings of other researchers (Judge et al., 1994; Frone and Yardley, 1996).

Managers, professionals and higher income groups were found to have the highest work-family conflict. The same groups have been assumed to have higher intra-organisational negotiating power in this study, and results showed that they were most likely to think that they and their skills were difficult to replace. So why do they observe the highest conflict, and why have they been unable to bring about any change in the way they work to reduce their conflict? Is higher work-life conflict an intrinsic part of jobs that are central and important in an organisation?

A noteworthy point was the difference in the attitudes of male and female managers. Male managers did not want flexible working to be made available to all employees in the organisations, an attitude not shared by their female counterparts. Thus, the influence of female managers on development of work-life policies need to be studied further.

As other researchers have found, longer working hours were associated with higher conflict. Increasing stress and workload were also linked to higher conflict. Thus, if the responsibility and stress in the average job is likely to increase in the future, as it has been doing in the recent past, and this increases work-family conflict, such conflict will deserve more attention in the future.

Organisational policies and culture may help reduce work-family conflict. Those who perceived managers and peers to be understanding about their out-of-work responsibilities, report lower conflict. A significant majority of those who were using

some form of flexible working option reported positive effects on their personal and family lives, on work satisfaction and performance, and reduced stress. Nearly one-third also suggested that it cuts down on their absenteeism, and attracted them to work for the organisation. However, analysis to show that flexi-time (the only widely used option in the organisation) could reduce work-family conflict produced no results.

After understanding employee attitudes, we now turn to the managerial interviews, to understand how and why Company B started using flexible working, and why it is planning to expand its use. Particular attention is given to the relative power of the employee and the employer to understand the possibilities for the long-term development of policies.

CHAPTER 8

THE EMPLOYEE VERSUS THE EMPLOYER

IN COMPANY B

Company B is interested in facilitating its employees to create a healthy work-life balance. It introduced flexi-time a few years ago. However, no official policies or guidelines were presented. Use of flexi-time is based on mutual trust between the individual and his/her line manager, and its availability is also at the discretion of the line manager. People do work from home occasionally, but it is unofficial. The organisation is looking into introducing home-working and tele-working more officially. Part-time workers fall only into the return-from-maternity-leave category. A comprehensive maternity leave package is offered, paternity leave is available, and requests for career breaks may be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, jobs are not guaranteed at the end of a career break. Other family friendly benefits include a counselling service and self-growth policies.

Chapter 7 discussed employee attitudes towards flexible working. In this Chapter, we find out why Company B is offering flexibility, and why it is thinking of expanding the use of flexible working. Internal and external changes likely to influence the future of these policies are debated to explore possibilities for the long-term development of flexible working. Four topics are covered:

1. Perceived benefits of flexible working by the employer
2. Negotiating power of the employee
3. Division of responsibility to create a better work-life balance
4. External factors influencing the work-life debate

Whereas Chapter 7 reported analysis from the employee survey, this Chapter presents findings from interviews carried out with the management of Company B. Thus, the data discussed is dependent on managerial opinion and perspective, and where the questions were retrospective in nature, also on their memory. The chapter also occasionally draws on the employee survey. Three interviews were carried out, varying from one to one-and-a-half hours in length. The interviewees were (i) the HR Operations Manager, (ii) the Project Leader of the Software Developments Unit, and

(iii) a Project Manager in the Manufacturing Technology Division. There is no trade union membership in the organisation, and hence the union perspective is not covered.

The interviews covered questions on use and availability, and cost and benefits, of flexible working. Personal and work-related employee characteristics, as well as external factors that are likely to influence negotiating power were discussed. Since these interviews were carried out after completion of the survey analysis of Company B, two issues raised in the analysis are discussed in detail. These were the reluctance of managers to expand the use of flexible working, and compatibility of managerial and professional jobs with reduced time flexible working. Additional selected findings were also briefly discussed.

8.1 PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING BY THE EMPLOYER

Company B provides flexibility, and is thinking of expanding and formalising its use of some flexible working options. This section explores the organisational perspective on the benefits of flexible working to understand why the organisation provides flexibility, and why it is thinking of developing such policies further. Attention is given to bottom-line benefits and soft-issues.

The organisation viewed flexible working as an essential element in being a good employer. It was seen as a strong selling point to attract quality staff, and the key benefit mentioned and stressed by all interviewees was to retain good staff:

The benefit of flexible working, for us, is really retaining people for long term. You are kind of rewarding them by giving them flexibility, rather than necessarily, always more money.

(HR Operations Manager)

In fact, it was due to repeated requests from the Team Leader of Software Developments to retain key workers that they were analysing the possibilities of expanding and formalising the use of home-working.

The guys that I have got in my team, the software developers, they are quite a rare skill – they are quite difficult to get hold off. I want to offer them

flexibility, and whatever I can do within my power, to retain those people. That is why I am very keen to push flexible working, remote working, home working etc.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

As this team leader pointed out, home-working becomes more important if the organisation is trying to attract and retain individuals from a more geographically dispersed labour market. This could be inevitable if one is trying to locate specialised and scarce skills.

After introducing flexi-time, they had carried out a survey to find out employee reactions to the availability of this option, and the results had been reasonably positive. One of the managers perceived that once home-working is more formalised, there could be financial benefits through better utilisation of office space. Home working was also associated with increased productivity.

I don't know anyone who works occasionally from home and doesn't say that they get more done at home than they do at a day in the office.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Many less tangible benefits were discussed. For example, a 'feel-good factor' created by the knowledge that the organisation cares, and the simple 'law of reciprocity'.

At the end of the day it is give and take, and if the company is ready to show that they are prepared to have a little bit of give as well, then the individuals give an awful lot more back.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Drawbacks in offering flexibility were also highlighted, however. Due to flexi-time, there can be some negative efficiency issues in term of scheduling meetings, and difficulty in on-the-job training of new entrants. Reluctance to expand home working due to health and safety legal implications were highlighted. For reduced time working options, there was a head-count problem, that every individual was counted as a head whether they worked one hour a day, one day or five days a week. Management is thinking of sorting out this accountancy problem in the near future.

Overall, the benefits reported were general, and the problems more specific. The specific benefits reported – attraction and retention of staff – are indicators of the power of employees i.e. employees driving the change. This is not surprising, because of the stage at which the organisation is in offering flexible working policies. Managers agree, in principle, that people should be able to create a better work-life balance, and thus, requests to create better balance through flexible working do not meet much resistance. However, organisational work-life philosophy has not evolved to the stage where the company is ready to take an initiative itself. In this instance, the discussion on bargaining power between the employee and the employer in the forthcoming sections is likely to be insightful.

8.2 NEGOTIATING POWER OF THE EMPLOYEE VERSUS THE EMPLOYER

This section aims to understand factors influencing the negotiating power of the employer and the employee. The ‘power struggle’ between these two is the focal point of the research framework (Figure 3.1). It is through the concept of negotiating power that we can comprehend how long-term change in work-life policies may be brought about. Characteristics of employees which were thought to influence their bargaining position were discussed in detail in interviews with the management. These were:

1. The demographic group to which the individual belongs (e.g. women, especially those with young children)
2. Centrality of the individual/group in terms of the knowledge and skills they bring to the organisation

Interviewees were also asked to explain if there were any other differentiations between employee groups in the availability of flexible working. Reasons behind offering the policies practised, and incentives to expand and formalise other flexible working options were discussed. Explanations for differences between head-office and manufacturing employees were explored. During this discussion on negotiating power, interviewees also mentioned additional factors that are likely to influence the relative power of employees and employers.

Institutional pressures, external environmental characteristics, and organisational traits which may influence the provision of work-life policies in organisations are discussed separately in Section 8.4.

The **demographic grouping** of the individual is seen to influence their negotiating power. Since use of flexible working is informal, left at the discretion of the line manager and done on a case-by-case basis, the perceived stronger needs of those with dependant care responsibilities give them more power. Simple remarks illustrates this.

I think dependant care responsibilities gives employees a better case.

(HR Operations Manager)

The clear case to provide flexibility is for those who have children – it must be a big thing for them.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

Additional comments also indicated that managers associated flexible working with dependant care. An interesting way to view dependant care responsibilities was as a trigger to take up flexible working policies, which had been available previously, but had not been used.

If you offered everybody today the opportunity to work from home or to work on any other flexible working option, most people wouldn't take it, or most people wouldn't adjust their working habits that much. People want to feel that they have got the flexibility. When you bring in dependants, then there are more triggering points for people to go ahead and use flexible working.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

The company, however, did not offer reduced time options other than occasional part-time working in the return-from-maternity-leave category. Even in these instances, more requests were refused than accepted. The main reason to refuse these requests was an accountancy system which counted each person as a separate head irrespective of the number of hours they worked. Organisational reluctance to offer reduced time working was causing problems.

Quite a few people I know have left because they haven't been able to work part-time..... Definitely there is a problem of women coming back from maternity leave. (Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

The problem of women returning from maternity leave is also reflected in the sample characteristics – one-fourth of the sample is female, but only five percent are women with children.

The organisation is planning to change its accountancy system in near future. The HR Operations Manager explicitly pointed out that this change was to accommodate more part-time working – they had lost many valuable employees because of their inability to offer part-time work because of the accountancy system. This is an example of the power of people, gained through their ability/willingness to take action, to change organisational structures and routines.

The second idea debated was whether some groups had higher intra-organisational negotiating **power through the centrality of their skills and difficulty in replacing them**. This idea was supported by management interviews.

The skills of the individual make a difference – there would be some key individuals that the company would certainly not like to lose.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

We take a more individual approach anyway. There will always be pockets of people that are a bit more valuable to us. We might have an engineer who has got really scarce skills, who needs a bit of time off for something, and we are really keen to keep that person. We might be more likely to agree what he or she wants than somebody we could probably replace quite easily.

(HR Operations Manager)

It is easier to differentiate between individuals and groups on the basis of skills because of the lack of formal policies. More formalisation would hinder such differentiation. However, the Team Leader of Software Developers, a group of individuals with scarce

skills, offered a different perspective of dealing with employees with higher negotiating power.

Hmm! Negotiating power. Just because they have got power, that they are more important to you, does not necessarily mean that you let them win all the time.
(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

This is not withstanding the fact that the formalisation of home working is being considered in Company B because of increasing pressure from this Team Leader.

Power on the basis of skills and knowledge is also evident in the manner in which Company B is introducing flexible working policies. No flexible working policies are offered at the manufacturing plant. The survey was not distributed in this part of the company since the organisation does not plan to introduce flexibility here in the foreseeable future. Thus, differentiation exists between the high-status head-office employees, and the manufacturing employees, who are low-skilled.

The management also felt that head-office jobs were more compatible with flexibility. Flexibility could not be introduced in manufacturing without adversely affecting efficiency. Thus, the **perceived compatibility of flexibility with organisational routines and procedures** influences managerial attitudes. Because the management does not perceive manufacturing to be compatible with flexibility, and because the manufacturing employees do not have much negotiating power on the basis of their skills, it is unlikely that employee-friendly flexibility will be offered to them (Figure 3.1).

Another aspect of power, that was mentioned during discussions was **informal networking**. Personal contacts are likely to be one of the key influences on whether an individual's case for flexible working is accepted.

It is mostly informal networking – who you know and who is ready to fight your cause for you. (Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

In discussing results, the **attitudes of managers** towards flexibility were debated. Interviewees explained their perceptions of line managers' reluctance to provide flexible working to all employees. Some reasons given were practical. It is managers who have to manage the administrative side, and providing flexibility may increase their workload. But **psychological barriers** were stressed more.

I think that managers feel that they would lose control of their teams if people were coming and going when they wanted. Managers think, 'how do I know where that person is', or 'how do I know whether that person is working'. We say to them, you don't necessarily need to know as long as they deliver what you are expecting them to deliver. (HR Operations Manager)

It's a bit of fear that people have that by offering flexibility the work is somehow not going to get done. It is much easier to monitor people if they are here between quarter past eight and half-four, than it is sometimes to monitor their work if they are doing it outside the office.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

There was acceptance that it is very difficult for managers to change their ways. Introducing flexibility is a question of breaking old moulds, and **reluctance to change** was one of the barriers to increased use of flexibility.

Managers' reluctance is just managers being conservative. The work is getting done - Why change? (Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

There have been a lot of requests for part-time and job-share. I would say that its almost too much effort to put those sort of things in place. I feel that the company could do a lot more. Once they actually get used to operating reduced-time working, they would find that it wasn't such a problem.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

To make flexibility work, the changes mentioned by the interviewees were deep and profound – for example, a need to change management style, increased trust between managers and employees, accepting loss of control, a change of mind-set, a completely

different way of managing people. **Knowledge by the employer** regarding how a change towards flexibility will operationalise, and its impact on organisational routines and procedures is likely to reduce reluctance. Since more organisations are offering flexibility, employer knowledge and hence psychological barriers are likely to decrease in the future.

In parallel to the employer's knowledge, another aspect of negotiating power to emerge during discussions was **knowledge among employees of what it is possible for the organisation to offer**.

There is obviously pressure from employees. They are telling us that these are the sort of conditions we want, and this is how it can work.

(HR Operations Manager)

There is quite a lot of general awareness – I think things like that are quite well publicised these days in the general media – so people know about them.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Questions addressing the **compatibility of reduced time working and managerial and professional jobs** created a predictable picture. Mostly psychological barriers were preventing the use of reduced-time working in such jobs.

In large organisations, there are a very, very few positions that can't be done on part-time or job-share because there are very few positions that are unique. We haven't just got one HR person, we haven't just got one engineer. There is definitely a perception problem that it devalues the job, and that if you have a senior job being done on a part-time basis it is not appropriate.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

There is no reason why it (software designers working part-time) couldn't be done. We could do it. In a way, there shouldn't be any reason why it couldn't be done – but it isn't done at the moment. There is more thinking involved in it.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

Support for the argument that these barriers indicate a reluctance to change, or are psychological, becomes clearer through an example of remote teams. Managers of such teams are scarcely present to manage their teams. The HR Manager compares the two – managers of remote teams and managers working flexibly – to demonstrate the absence of actual barriers between reduced time working or home-working for managers.

We have a lot of people managing remote teams anyway. We might have a manager here who has a team that they are managing in Scandinavia, and they only get out there every now and then. And we obviously think it is o.k. for them to be their manager. Therefore, what is the difference in that, and in a manager being part-time. We certainly don't have a view that we are not going to have any managers working part-time – and the same thing for professionals.

(HR Operations Manager)

However, even though there are remote team managers, requests for part-time working in managerial posts is often refused. Changing business needs, e.g. increased use of virtual teams, may lower the psychological barriers over the compatibility of managerial and professional jobs with flexible working, once employees and employers get used to the physical absence of high-status employees.

A factor likely to influence power relationships that emerged during discussions was a move **from informal to formal use of flexible working**. At the moment, a continuing practice on an informal basis can be seen as a way for the employer to retain power. Although the organisation practices some flexible working policies, because of this informality of use requests are few, and individuals are unlikely to be aware of their rights.

From what I know, certainly for flexi-time and home-working, for the full-time guys, they want better guidelines on what is possible. It is very, very open at the moment, and because it is so open, nobody really knows what their options are, so nobody really does anything.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

If there are formal policies, people think that they are entitled to it, then more would ask for it, and that could cause a problem.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Moreover, if a case is accepted, the individual feels privileged and under obligation. The Project Manager interviewed was one of the few working part-time. She felt grateful to have the opportunity to work part-time, even though she felt opportunities for her were limited due to her part-time working, and she was doing a job which was not at the same level as she was doing before she switched.

Refusing requests and granting individual cases is easier due to informality. For example, one of the managers said that individuals could be refused reduced time working by saying that because there isn't a policy, therefore, the organisation cannot set a precedent by offering it to one or two people. But that is exactly what they do by considering on a case-by-case basis and offering it to a very few. This can breed unfairness.

In addition to unfairness, there are other negative influences of operating informally. With informality, it is easier for employees to breach the trust and to take advantage of the organisation. Because it is informal it is more difficult to regulate. Also, it can put more pressure on the managers, especially those who are either managing large numbers of people on flexible working, or just managing large numbers.

If you don't have formal policies, you are shifting the difficult question onto the manager.....At the end of the day, the managers who are probably looking after huge amounts of people, if they had to offer set policies, they would probably prefer it, because it takes away the individual decision.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Interpreting these conversations, there appears to be a threshold level of use of informal flexibility in an organisation. Upto this level, the advantages of informal use can outweigh its disadvantages; beyond this threshold level, the organisation is likely to benefit from offering formal policies. That is to say, when a company considers requests for flexibility, and demands on management are infrequent, informality can

provide employers with time to adjust to the new ways of working while retaining power over employees. Once momentum builds up, and the use and acceptability of flexibility increases, requests from employees become more frequent, a threshold level is reached, and the advantages of formalisation become stronger.

Ultimately, the power of individuals is likely to come from acceptance of the fact that the approach to work needs to change. In this respect, Company B has let its guard down, and accepted work-life balance as part of a new attitude towards work.

I think there have been a number of years, a period of time, when companies expected employees to give everything to the company. That has changed an awful lot – the approach to work has evolved. (HR Operations Manager)

In summary, the interviews confirmed the importance of the negotiating power of employees on the basis of demographic sub-grouping, centrality and difficulty in substitutability. Such differentiation existed largely because the use of flexible working was informal. Additional factors that influenced the respective power of employee and employer were informal networking, the attitudes of managers, psychological barriers, reluctance to change, and knowledge of what it is possible for the organisation to offer. Keeping policies formal or informal also influences the power relationship. However, the power of employees has increased through the acknowledgement that the approach to work has evolved, and needs to be more flexible.

8.3 DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO CREATE A BETTER WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In this section perspectives on the relative responsibilities of four stakeholders – government, organisations, individuals and trade-unions – are analysed. The purpose is to find out how employees and employers view their own role, and that of others. The results here draw on both the employee survey and management interviews. In both cases, respondents were asked to assign relative responsibility to the four groups.

The rankings given by employees indicate that they felt the main obligation lay with the organisation, followed by the individual, government, and trade unions (Table 8.1).

	Mean
Organisations should help employees improve the balance between their work and personal life.	1.57
The individual is responsible for finding the job that best suits his/her work-life requirements.	1.98
The government should introduce legislation to support organisations and individuals in creating better work-life balance.	2.75
Trade unions should take an active lead in convincing employers to adapt employee friendly working options.	3.70

Table 8.1: Responsibility for affecting work-life issues
(ranking range = 1-4; 1=top)

In the interviews, the first reaction of all three managers was that individuals, organisations and the government shared the responsibility equally. However, further discussion revealed that managers perceived individuals and the government as taking a more active role than the organisation.

I don't see one coming before any of the others there. All of them have a part to play. I don't see the business driving it off by its own accord.In terms of the agents of change, probably, I see it being mainly the individuals driving it, but through government and trade unions, and also through the employers as well. On the other side, I see the government driving it as well. But the government is here to serve and represent the people. They should only be driving it based on the views of the people. So again it is people.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

I think the government has got a big role, in terms of setting the precedent and setting the directions.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

The role of the company was seen as more passive.

I think the organisation has got the responsibility to be open to new ideas and approaches.

(HR Operations Manager)

Managerial attitudes reflect the stage of development of work-life policies in Company B. Managers are accepting flexibility as a part of HR policies, and are changing their approach towards work. Their attitudes have not developed to the extent that they are prepared to take initiatives themselves, yet they have evolved enough to be open to new ideas. Hence, they have a positive attitude towards pressures coming from the government and individuals.

8.4 EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE WORK-LIFE DEBATE

This section aims to understand institutional pressures, external environmental characteristics and organisational features which are shaping work-life policies in Company B. It complements the discussion on negotiating power between the employee and the employer (Section 8.2). External factors are analysed to understand the long-term development of work-life policies in Company B and other organisations.

As in the discussion of external factors in Company A (Section 6.4 and Figure 6.1), the analysis here includes reflection on firm-level research by other researchers who have attempted to understand why organisations have responded differently to work-family issues, and also the external pressures upon organisations which have increased the significance of work-life balance.

The data presented is from the management interviews. The following were discussed as factors that may influence the provision of work-life policies:

- What other organisations are offering (as role models or competitors for staff).
- Influences from Europe, for example, through the Social Chapter, or through people being aware of the social demographic systems in some European countries.
- Political climate in the UK - Labour versus Conservative
- Change in social values
- Stages of economic cycle

Although the pressure to increase use of flexible working appeared largely internal, employees were likely to demand more flexibility and the company was more likely to

be willing to consider their requests, because of institutional pressures and the external environment. Perhaps the largest external influence has been what other organisations are offering. This influence went beyond the need to compete for quality staff. In fact, there was a changing attitude towards work, from studying best practice in other organisations.

Come on guys, we are in the 21st century – a lot of other companies have been doing it.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

The type of organisation we are, we need to move with the times. I think it is clear that more and more companies are taking this approach, or offering more flexible ways of working. The only way that we can move forward ourselves is to do that. I think successful companies of the future need to be flexible.

(HR Operations Manager)

Thus, an interconnected work environment was playing a significant role in lowering barriers to increased use of flexible working. This kind of issue is discussed in institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977) and is developed further in Chapter 9.

However, competition for staff was also one of the drivers. Managers are more likely to be aware of what is happening in their own sector, and the significance given to requests from employees with scarce resources was to avoid these employees leaving for competitors who offer flexible working.

So many other organisations are offering such things, for example, if you read our competitor's reports, say Ericsson, Motorola, Sony, BT, it says a lot of things in term of the flexibility they offer. Certainly home working comes up a lot. I would think that that would start to influence things as well.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Influences were not limited to the UK. The interconnectedness of the work environment is increasingly global, or European-wide. These affect employees' knowledge of other possibilities;

Fathers are also saying they want 4 days weeks. Men are following, more from the European counterparts, realising that other places in Europe do offer different systems, and that they would like to have a part of family life and working life as well.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

I know that some of our Scandinavian counterparts get a lot more flexibility than we do in the UK. For example, I know people in Scandinavia who have got very senior positions and do reduced hours, they do shorter days, some work compressed work weeks.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Legislation from the European Union had also influenced policies. Over the last few years, Company B has made many changes in its HR policies due to legislation on parental leave and paternity leave. The right of women to return to part-time work after maternity leave was the latest policy that employees were looking forward to. Thus, legislation is improving employees' bargaining position.

People are very well aware of their rights – If any piece of legislation comes out, people are aware of it. People will push hard for their rights if they think they are entitled to it.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

The company has a welcoming attitude towards legislation and other initiatives coming from the government.

I think once organisations are told that they have to do something, it is much easier for them to make the decision, full-steam ahead and go down. Whilst if there is no policy behind it, the competitive side of things will always take over and win. So I think for changes to happen, there needs to be policy changes, and I think the changes we have seen coming from Europe definitely had an impact.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

This is a compliance attitude (Oliver, 1991), where the company is not yet prepared to take the initiative itself, but is welcoming to external pressures. Other studies have shown similar responses from organisations (DiMaggio, 1988; Meyer and Rowan, 1983; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). In the interviews, government was taken as a neutral term – no differentiation was made between the attitudes of the current Labour government and the Conservatives, and a change of political parties in the next election was not seen as likely to influence flexible working policies. Certainly, as the ball has been set into motion, a reversal of policies or attitudes is not readily possible if the Conservatives came into power.

Another reason for a change in organisational policies on work-life balance may be to improve social legitimacy and fitness (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Oliver, 1991). All interviewees thought that providing flexibility was likely to make them ‘the employer of choice’, not only for those who want this flexibility for themselves, but for others as well. A direct association between social responsibility and offering work-life balance to employees was reflected in the interviews.

Power of people comes from reputation as well. Company B prides itself on being a fair and ethical company.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

A major external factor, disturbing the negotiating power of the employee would be the economic cycle and unemployment levels.

Overall, managers thought that a recession would not change the policies offered. However, it was stressed that a recession could slow down progress. Employees may be more reluctant to ask for flexibility, and the organisation may not expand its use of existing policies.

If we go into a recession, then obviously things are going to slow down. Employers are going to be in a much stronger position. There has been a lot of movement between companies – in our industry people move around. That will have to stop, and therefore, employees will not be in such a strong position to

be able to make demands, because they won't have so many choices.

(HR Operations Manager)

Once the organisation has offered flexibility, and they have got used to that way of working, I don't think they would probably take it away. What they probably would do is stop offering it to other people.....and definitely less people would come forward and ask for flexibility.

(Project Manager - Manufacturing Technology Division)

Managers explained that the economic cycle was unlikely to influence organisational policies because such a change did not make long-term sense – one needed to think beyond the recession. Also, pressure from employees, which is likely to reduce in a recession, is not the only reason behind flexibility offered by the organisation.

You always have to think, we go into a recession, you are going to come out of it at some point. If you treat the people less well during the bad time, why on earth when the good times come again should they stay.

(Project Leader - Software Development Unit)

I would like to think that the organisational policies don't change. At the end of the day, the policies that we have in place are because that is the sort of company we want to be.

(HR Operations Manager)

Summary

External pressures in the form of what other organisations are offering, legislation, social legitimacy, and the strength of the economy, was seen by managers as influencing the adoption of flexible working as a work-life policy, and negotiating power. However, the organisation was welcoming to these external pressures. This is because management has, in principle, accepted that approaches to work are evolving, and flexible working is the way forward. Organisations that do not consider work-life balance to be a significant topic may feel the pressure of external factors very differently. Overall, an appreciation of external factors adds richness to the understanding of the work-life debate in organisations (Figure 6.1).

8.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this chapter reflect the stage at which the organisation is in offering work-life policies to its employees. Management accepts that flexible working and work-life policies are important HR issues. A few policies are used, but the initiative is not coming from the management – organisational work-life philosophy has not developed to this stage. On the contrary, the increase in the use of flexibility was clearly due to the demands of the majority of employees [H4]. The key benefits reported by management were to attract and retain employees. Thus, employees, through their ability to vote with their feet, are shaping policies [H3].

Results from interviews supported the hypotheses of power-from-status [H2] and power through the ability to act [H3] in this organisation. At present, there is differentiation in the policies offered and used by employees on the basis of demographic grouping and their intra-organisational negotiating power arising from skills. Two of the new flexible working policies introduced could be associated with these employee groups. Part-time working was being introduced to accommodate women returning from maternity leave, since absence of such a policy had resulted in a high turnover of young mothers. The organisation was also thinking of expanding and formalising its use of home-working to assist soft-ware designers, a group of individuals with scarce skills.

This differentiation is possible because policies are informal. There was acknowledgement of the desire of those without dependant care responsibilities to create a better work-life balance, and even use reduced time working. It was anticipated that if formal reduced-time policies are introduced they would be used by those without children as well. Similarly, for home working policies, where these were being formalised with the team of software designers specifically in mind, formalisation was likely to make subsequent differentiation on the basis of skills more difficult.

Perhaps the best way to describe the process is to say that, in the initial stages of offering work-life policies, mothers of young children and those with scarce resources have high negotiating power, through which they trigger the process of work-life

debate. Once work-life policies start to develop, they are likely to be made available to all employees, and differentiation becomes difficult to sustain.

In the initial stages, the use of flexibility is more likely to be informal, and the power of the employer is greater due to the lack of policies. However, as the use of informal flexibility increases, informality can breed unfairness, make policies difficult to regulate, and can put an extra burden for taking decisions on managers. There appears to be a threshold level in the use of flexibility in an organisation, beyond which the advantages of formalisation outweigh its disadvantages.

The early stage of development of Company B is also reflected in the strong external influences reported by management. The stage at which the company is at, in the adoption of flexible working and its work-life philosophy, is likely to determine the influence of external factors in the power debate. The three managers interviewed believed that the role of government was more significant than the organisation in enabling employees to achieve a better work-life balance, while other companies, legislation, what is happening in other countries, and improved social legitimacy, influenced company policies.

In discussing the barriers to the use of flexibility, there was an acknowledgement that many of the deterrents are psychological, or reflect a reluctance to change. External influences were lowering barriers by increasing knowledge and acting as triggers of change. One of the main factors, influencing employee and employer attitudes was 'knowledge'. Employee knowledge of what it was possible for the organisation to offer, and employer knowledge of how flexibility can work is increasing and is likely to lower psychological barriers. This increased knowledge is likely to be among the main factors towards the increased use of flexible working in large organisations.

Overall, the research framework (Figure 3.1) was useful to understand the process of change. Altering demographics and a higher skilled workforce are likely to increase the demand for flexibility by the workforce. The flexibility offered by management depends upon the perceived compatibility of flexibility with business needs, and also, managerial attitudes towards flexibility. Perceived unsuitability was one of the reasons that manufacturing employees were not offered flexibility.

Although employees and employers are both important players in the work-life debate, in Company B the attitudes of both, especially managers, are strongly influenced by external factors. This is because the organisation is in the initial stages of offering flexible working as a work-life policy and/or because of managerial attitudes, company culture and workplace characteristics. In this instance, external factors added to the modified framework (Figure 6.1) become essential to understand the long-term development of work-life policies.

With this discussion on Company B, analysis of the empirical data is concluded. The two chapters to follow present the summary of the results of the project, and engage the reader in a more theoretical discussion.

CHAPTER 9

A COMPARISON OF COMPANY FINDINGS

This chapter compares findings from Company A and Company B, integrating results with the work of other scholars. The employee survey results had many similarities across both organisations. Consistency between results increases if responses of the high-status employees of Company A are compared to the findings of Company B, as the latter sample consisted disproportionately of high-status employees. Similarities are observed in the employee desire for flexible working, and in the attitudes which influence power relationships.

The differences observed are more in the management attitudes than in the results from the employee surveys. These differences in attitudes and perceptions reflect, among other factors, the fact that Company B is in the initial stages of developing its work-life policies, whereas Company A has formalised policies and a mature approach. The Chapter is divided into four sections:

1. The research in its context
2. Attitudes towards flexible working
3. Power relationships affecting the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working
4. Differences in organisational responses to work-life policies

The first section briefly describes the case-study organisations comparing them with the UK norms. The second section presents the summary of employee and employer attitudes towards flexible working. It indicates where the findings supported or contradicted initial assumptions and the research framework. Problems with the use of the term 'flexibility' are highlighted. The importance of diversity in employee needs, the presence of psychological barriers in the design and use of flexibility, the role of managers in the design and implementation of policies, and the influence of formal and informal use of flexibility on power dynamics are discussed.

The third section discusses power relationships. As anticipated, a combination of internal and external factors was found to influence power, and support the long-term

development of policies. Knowledge and ideological barriers emerged as additional influences on the power dynamics.

Variations between the two companies are used to understand differences in organisational responses to work-life policies. These are discussed in the fourth section, which also presents a new framework.

This chapter is a qualitative discussion and comparison of results. Statistical evidence has been presented in earlier chapters.

9.1 THE RESEARCH IN ITS CONTEXT

Work-life balance has been an important policy issue in the UK since the beginning of this research project in 1997. There have been considerable developments in the availability of data on work-life and family-friendly policies in the UK. Two significant studies in this regard are the WERS 1998 (Cully et al., 1999) and the DfEE Work-life balance 2000 baseline study (Hogarth et al., 2001). Both studies provide data from the management and employee perspectives, and were large-scale representative national surveys. While the DfEE baseline study exclusively covered work-life policies, parts of the WERS 1998 have been analysed further by scholars to understand family-friendly employment in Britain (e.g. Dex and Smith, 2002).

The aim of this section is to understand the relative position of the two case study organisations compared to the national average. Use, availability and desirability of flexible working policies in the organisations is related to the national statistics where comparable data was available. Associations between organisational characteristics and provision of policies are highlighted.

Compared with the national average as estimated through the WERS 1998 and the DfEE Work-life balance baseline survey 2000, Company A clearly provided above average family-friendly policies. The WERS 1998 inquired about the provision of 11 different policies which can be labelled as family-friendly. Twenty-nine percent of organisations had four or more of these arrangements (Cully et al., 1999). This project provided information about six of these policies, all of which were provided by

Company A. Similarly the DfEE baseline study provided information about eight different policies, of which seven overlapped with this research. Six of these policies were provided by Company A, which is a higher proportion than average (Hogarth et al., 2001).

Company A also had a crèche facility near the head-office where subsidised nursery places are provided to employees' children. In the UK, crèche facilities are provided by only two percent of establishments, and subsidised nursery places by only one percent (Hogarth et al., 2001). This reinforces the idea that Company A is a family-friendly organisation.

Company B, on the other hand, provided three policies which overlapped with the national surveys. Although some additional policies were reported to be used by the employee survey in Company B, the management held the view that this was unofficial use, and did not agree that the organisation provided these policies. This comparison supports the idea that this organisation is in the primary phases of change. However, the use of these policies in Company B, especially part-time working, was limited. While the national data does not provide information about the extent of use within each establishment, the corresponding employee data provides information on percentage of employees covered by each policy. From the DfEE baseline 2000 employee data, it is known that 70 percent of women returning from maternity leave switched to part-time working (Hogarth et al., 2001), a finding supported by an earlier national study (Forth et al., 1997) which reported that part-time was available to two out of three mothers. In this light, Company B, which only occasionally accepts part-time requests following maternity leave, appears below average on the provision of family-friendly policies. However, the organisation offered extended maternity leave. Also, the worksite studied had managerial and professional staff, and such staff are less likely to work reduced hours (Hogarth et al., 2001; Dex and Smith, 2002). On the other hand, considering that high-status workers have been associated with other types of flexible working options, Company B, which had a high proportion of such employees, did not offer a large number of work-life policies.

Some additional characteristics which made the case-study organisations more likely to provide flexible working in the light of the national data (Hogarth et al., 2001; Cully et

al., 1999; Dex and Smith, 2002; Forth et al., 1997) were that they were large organisations, with HR specialists, and equal opportunity policies. Company A also had a recognised union. However, they were both in the private sector, whereas public sector organisations are more likely to provide such policies. Also, Company A had a high proportion of women in the workforce, and Company B had a highly educated workforce, both of which are characteristics associated with greater provision of policies (Dex and Smith, 2002).

The national surveys indicate that most employers offered part-time and flexi-time, and the corresponding employee data shows that these were the most prevalent flexible working patterns among the workforce (Hogarth et al., 2001; Dex and Smith, 2002). The case-study organisations were not unusual since these were the prevalent flexible patterns, despite the low use of part-time working in Company B, reasons for which have been discussed earlier in this section. Other options, like term-time working, job-share and compressed work-week were less likely to be used. For home-working, though the national surveys indicated that a reasonable proportion of establishments offered it (18 to 38 percent based on different sources), the percentage of employees using it was low. In analysing the WERS 1998, the use of home-working has been described by Dex and Smith (2002) as a fringe benefit for the senior staff. This idea was again supported by the case study organisations, where a few part-time homeworkers existed in high-status jobs. (In this project, part-time home working was defined as home-working during contracted working hours and does not include work taken home otherwise).

Another part of the data where comparison is possible between the DfEE baseline survey 2000 and the data collected by this project is the latent demand for various flexible working options among employees. There were several similarities in the findings. Data from Company A and B, as well as the national survey indicates that the greatest areas of potential demand were flexitime, compressed work week and home working – all options that do not involve time-income trade-off. In all the data-sets, the practice least in demand was job-sharing, with term-time and reduced time working in between the two extremes.

While the percentages of employees who have a latent demand are not directly comparable because the denominators of this study and the DfEE study are different – the whole sample for this project, and only those to whom the option is not available for the DfEE baseline survey – this affects mostly flexi-time and part-time, since low use of other options makes the denominator similar. Some figures are strikingly similar, e.g. compressed work week is desired by 35 percent in the DfEE study, by 34 percent in Company A and 39 percent in Company B. The corresponding figures for term-time working are 25 percent, 20 percent and 21 percent. While other percentages differ, the order of desirability of options remains similar. The differences in percentages may be because of the workforce characteristics of case-study organisations (e.g. male majority in Company B), or organisational characteristics since the comparisons are between nationally representative samples and samples within companies.

Overall, Hogarth et al. (2001) conclude that there was substantial demand for flexible working among employees. This project has made similar conclusions about employee desire, and equated this to a potential pressure upon organisations to provide more flexibility. It is also argued that one of the main factors influencing resistance to this pressure is employer opinion, and national surveys show high level of employer support in this area (Hogarth et al., 2001; Cully et al., 1999). Another factor influencing this pressure is the opinion of co-workers, to ensure that there is no negative response from employees to the provision of flexibility to other employees (the multiplicity of demand concept). The DfEE baseline survey 2000, where comparable information was available, shows that concerns about any potential unfairness arising from work-life practices is much lower among employees than employers (Hogarth et al., 2001). This can be equated to the lack of multiplicity of demand among employees, thus increasing pressure upon employers to provide the options desired by employees. However, the answers in the baseline survey 2000 may be subject to the same weakness as this study – of providing socially desirable answers.

In summary, the support for this project's findings in the above comparison with the national overview increases confidence in them. However, the comparison should be viewed with caution, as the operationalisation or interpretation of certain terms may be different, though an attempt was made to compare prudently. For example, in the above summary, reduced time working has been equated with voluntary reduced time because

the definition provided by the DfEE baseline survey 2000 for reduced time was very similar to the definition of voluntary reduced time in this project. However, special leave or unpaid leave for emergencies has not been equated to career breaks or sabbaticals because the definitions were not found to be compatible. Also, much of the WERS 1998 data on availability of policies related to non-managerial employees only.

9.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORKING

This section discusses employee and employer attitudes towards flexible working, to understand the long-term development of policies. The first sub-section follows the research framework (Figure 3.1). It indicates where the findings supported or contradicted the initial assumptions (Section 3.5), and an attempt is made to integrate the results with the work of other scholars. The second sub-section discusses additional findings, which either helped throw light on the work of others, or provided an enlightened perspective of the work-life debate.

9.2.1 Results in the light of the research framework

The original research framework (Figure 3.1) suggested that the needs, attitudes and desires of employees to have more flexibility is increasing because of alterations in the demographic composition of the workforce, due to changes at work and because variations in both these areas (are likely to) increase work-family conflict. From the organisational perspective, the framework suggests that organisations may offer flexible working due to its benefits as a family-friendly policy, and/or because of the direct business advantages. The discussion in this sub-section follows these main concepts of the framework, which were elaborated in Section 3.5, to indicate whether the key ideas were supported by the findings. Results are also discussed in relation to the key hypotheses, particularly H1 which establishes associations between changes in the demographic composition of the workforce and desire for flexible working and work-life balance.

Evidence linking the new **demographic groups** to a greater **desire for flexible working** was not as strong as was initially anticipated in either organisation. The lack of intensity and frequency of this finding was overshadowed by an unmistakable

support for flexible working by all employees, which indicates that flexibility is attractive to everybody. Thus, unilateral desire partly masked associations between demographics and flexibility.

However, some findings supported this link. Females in both organisations [H1a], and dual-career couples [H1b] in Company B, responded more strongly to general attitude statements towards flexibility. Several differences were found on the basis of demographics in the desirability of reduced time options. Women showed greatest interest in reduced working time, as anticipated from the desk research. But dual career couples and dual career fathers (both in Company A only) also showed greater interest in such flexibility than other groups. This provides support for the argument that the entrance of females into the workforce from different lifecycle stages has indirectly created a more heterogeneous male workforce insofar as working women may put responsibility for dependant care onto men. Also, in such dual career households, financial responsibilities are shared, which is likely to influence men's decision to use time-income trade-off options.

Differences on the basis of demographics were also reflected through the responses to additional questions, which showed that women were also more willing to trade pay for free-time, and showed greater readiness to vote with their feet [H3a and H3b]. Women do leave work, take-up part-time work, and move to jobs for which they are over-qualified, after having children (Martin and Roberts, 1984). They are the majority of part-time workers and job-sharers (Social Trends, 1997). These attitudes and actions give women 'the ability to accomplish their will' (Giddens, 1979), and a stronger recognition of their needs. If use of flexible working in the two organisations is taken as an indicator of their ability to accomplish their will, most part-time workers were women, and this provides partial support for H3b. However, no difference existed in the use of flexitime, the other widely available option.

Thus, the findings support the WERS 1998 view that all employees desire flexibility, just that women are more likely to desire it (Cully et al., 1999). Other work-life researcher have also highlighted that although this was an issue started by or for women, there have been considerable developments over the last decade or so, and it is now recognised as an issue for all employees – women, dual-career couples and all men

(Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Gottlieb, Kelloway and Barham, 1998; Daniels, 2000; Rapoport et al., 2002; Hogarth et al., 2001; Dex and Smith, 2002).

Perhaps the best way to understand the influence of demographics on work-life desire is understanding the desire for types of flexible working. Large-scale survey data on men and women's use and desire for flexibility shows that women are more likely to prefer reduced time options, while men desire working time arrangements that allowed flexibility over the day, week or a longer period (Hogarth et al., 2001; Dex and Smith, 2002). The national data shows that in general, those with children and women are more likely to have work-life provisions. However, these differences do not exist in flexi-time and home-working (Dex and Smith, 2002), or flexi-time and compressed work weeks (Hogarth et al., 2001).

Thus, demographic grouping of the individual influences their attitudes towards types of flexible working, though not necessarily towards flexible working in general.

A theoretical explanation of the differences in women's and men's opinion comes from the literature on gender. This perspective highlights how the role of women and men in the social context are reflected in the organisational context. However, the literature on gender and organisations is divided on whether organisational structures and cultures are gender neutral or not (Halford and Leonard, 2001). It is through these perspectives that it can be debated whether differences in the attitudes of men and women towards (types of) flexible working can narrow without radical change in organisations.

While gender has not been the lens to observe change in this study, the process of challenging organisational structures and cultures, and the basic beliefs about the best way of organising work (discussed Chapter 10) is a theme shared with this theoretical perspective. This perspective has been used by some work-life researchers (Rapoport et al., 2002) to challenge ideas of ideal work and ideal worker.

The argument that differences may exist in the desirability of flexible working on the basis of age were not supported [H1c]. Researchers with different perspectives have associated flexibility with various age groups. It has been associated with the younger

people (the 'Generation X' phenomenon; Cannon, 1995, 1996), with some work-life researchers also indicating that this age-group may have a greater desire for work-life balance (Rapoport et al., 2002; Bailyn, 1993; Daniels, 2000). Others have argued that it is desired by the 'sandwich generation', the middle-aged group who have childcare and eldercare responsibilities (e.g. Harrop and Moss, 1995; Gottlieb et al., 1998).

We argue that the lack of differences on the basis of age in the present research reflects the fact that all age groups desire flexibility. How they want to utilise the free time created, or enjoy the greater autonomy created, is likely to vary with the individual, their age, and their lifecycle stage. Thus, it is important to recognise the diversity of employee attitudes and needs in designing work-life policies.

Nevertheless, other researchers have found statistical links between types of flexible working and age (Dex and Smith, 2002; Gottlieb et al., 1998). The absence of any links in this study may be because of the methodology and the sample.

While the project recognises that eldercare responsibilities, lone parenthood and ethnicity may influence work-life desires, these assumptions could not be empirically tested through the surveys for reasons discussed in Chapter 4. Managers in both companies recognised the eldercare issues, though this was not reflected directly in organisational policies. The managers gave no indication that they felt any associations between ethnicity and (types of) flexible working. Having said that, the interviewees were not the managers of ethnic minority groups as the samples reflected. The WERS 1998 data has indicated some associations between ethnicity and use of flexible working (Dex and Smith, 2002).

Thus, the survey data provides limited evidence that increase in the proportion of certain demographic groups is likely to increase pressure on organisations to provide flexibility. However, accepting the shortcoming of cross-sectional survey data, to provide causal associations or to provide reasons for reaching the state that is reached, the interview data is used to further understand the role of changing demographics in adoption of work-life policies. This is discussed in the section on power (Section 9.3) and in the final chapter (Section 10.1).

No associations were found between **changes at work** and a higher **desire for flexible working** in either organisation. Past experiences of restructuring and downsizing, which have been argued to influence personal values and career aspirations (Collins, 1996; Rousseau, 1995; Schor, 1991; Saltzman, 1991; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) were not found to be associated with higher desire for flexible working or work-life balance. This does not necessarily imply that such links do not exist, but that more research using a different methodological or analytical approach, and perhaps more careful operationalisation of these concepts is needed to understand these relationships. However, the arguments by other scholars that support this association are theoretical and indirect, and there is little empirical evidence of such associations. Thus, it is possible that a direct link may not exist.

Similarly, increase in stress, workload or responsibilities, or long working hours were not found to be associated with higher desire for flexible working or work-life balance. These changes have been argued to influence the desire for a better work-life balance (TUC, 1995; Coe, 1993; Benbow, 1993; Schor, 1991; Laabs, 1996, Ehrenreich, 1995), and long working hours and stress are issues often highlighted by work-life researchers (Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Daniels, 2000; Bailyn, 1993; Rapoport et al., 2002; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Lewis and Cooper, 1995; Hogarth et al., 2001). Some have also argued that flexibility reduces stress (Gottlieb, Kelloway and Barham, 1998; Daniels, 2000; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). However, this study was not able to find a direct empirical link in this area.

Such relationships are, however, likely to exist because there is evidence that people want to work fewer hours (TUC, 1995; Hogarth et al., 2001), and they turn down promotions for fear of added responsibility (Schor, 1991; Laabs, 1996, Ehrenreich, 1995, Social Trends, 1997). Previous chapters have discussed the weaknesses of the methodology used in this study to explore associations between flexibility and changes at work (Chapter 4 and Section 5.5.3). A different methodology or analytical approach, may be able to show more direct links.

An alternative view of the absence of results is also illuminating. There is a lack of recognition, by employers and employees, that flexible working can be used to reduce stress caused by overwork. Also, it is ideologically less acceptable to request a

reduction in working time, or request long-term leave, due to the overbearing demands of a job. Rather than requesting flexibility in a job which is leading to burnout, employees often leave the organisation. Increasing recognition of sabbaticals to revitalise employees (e.g. Sunday Times, 2000, 2001) is the first step in this direction, and an effort by organisations to retain key employees. Other options, like voluntary reduced time, can also be used in this capacity. Perhaps their potential will be recognised as virile attitudes towards work are challenged.

Work-family conflict, is a central concept in the individual's part of the framework. Both demographic and work-related changes were argued to influence this conflict. However, the results indicate that the greater desire for flexibility by the newer demographic groups is not due to greater work-family conflict. Contrary to initial assumptions, only a few weak relationships were found between demographics and work-family conflict. No difference was found in the conflict observed by men and women, which is consistent with the findings of other researchers (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992, 1997). However, the absence of a relationship between childcare responsibilities and conflict was contrary to the findings of others (Judge et al., 1994; Frone and Yardley, 1996).

Work-related changes were linked to higher **work-family conflict** in both organisations. Increasing stress and workload were correlated with higher conflict, supporting the findings of others (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Granrose, 1992; Wagner and Neal, 1994; Lewis and Cooper, 1988a, 1988b). As stress and workload is increasing, and jobs are likely to become more intense and demanding, workers in the future will face greater conflict if adjustments are not made, and new ways of working are not adopted.

Further, occupational groups whose proportion is likely to increase in the future – managers and professionals – reported highest work-family conflict among occupational groups, as anticipated by other researchers (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Judge et al., 1994).

In both organisations, the strongest association was between longer working hours and work-family conflict, an observation made frequently by others as well (e.g. Judge et

al., 1994; National Work-Life Forum, 2000; Brockner et al., 1993; Simpson, 1997; Hogarth et al., 2001). Long hours are partly due to the 'presentism' culture that exists in many organisations, but they may also be due to the actual workload. Due to tighter cost controls, restructuring, and loss of personnel, people have a greater workload, which leads to longer working hours. Brockner et al. (1993) combine the two together, demonstrating that the 'survivor syndrome' makes employees eager to demonstrate visible commitment to the job (hence a presentism culture), and work harder, taking on more responsibilities. With decreased job-security, these trends are likely to grow, increasing the conflict observed by employees, unless the problem is recognised and tackled.

The argument that work-family conflict has negative consequences for the organisation was supported by associations between higher conflict and reduced satisfaction with work and commitment to the organisation in both organisations. Such associations are well documented (Table 2.1). Associations also existed between employees' perception of a supportive work atmosphere and reduced work-family conflict as anticipated (Ezra and Deckman, 1996; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Bruce and Reed, 1994; Rogers and Rogers, 1989; Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

However, the flexible working options that were used in the organisations studied – flexitime and part-time working in Company A, and flexi-time in Company B – were found to reduce conflict only in Company A. Nevertheless, the employees of Company B reported lower conflict than those of Company A. The Company B employees were also more likely to find their managers, supervisors and peers more understanding about their work-life needs. Thus, it is concluded that the influence of formal policy must be studied with informal practices, as suggested by other scholars (Holt and Thaulow, 1996). However, in this comparison of work-family conflict and perceived organisational support, it should be kept in perspective that the personal and work-related characteristics of the employees of the two organisations differed widely, and this may influence results.

Before moving on to the organisational side of the framework, it is important to highlight some possible weaknesses in the work-family conflict results. Recent research has highlighted that the attempt to understand the work-life interface through work-

family conflict is exploring a partial version of the whole picture (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Also, work-family conflict may be influenced by other factors not included in this study, such as the support at home available to the individual. Moreover, as the organisations studied were offering work-life policies and considered themselves as family-friendly, the reported conflict may be distorted. Even if the users of formal policies are separated from those who were not using any such policies, the affect of informal practices remains.

From the **organisational perspective**, results from both organisations indicated that employees who perceived they were facing higher conflict reported lower satisfaction with work and lower commitment to the organisation. These negative effects are well documented, along with others e.g. stress, burnout, psychological distress, depression, poor physical health, loss of productivity, accidents, absenteeism, and turnover (see Chapter 2). Recognition of these consequences is one of the reasons that **work-life policies**, including employee-friendly flexible working, are being offered by more organisations.

The benefits of flexibility as a family-friendly policy were supported by managers and employees in both organisations. Such advantages are widely recognised (see Chapter 2 and 3). In this well-researched topic, though a variety of benefits are cited, the ones most frequently acknowledged by management are the recruitment and retention of employees. In this project, differences in managerial responses of the two companies show that in the initial stages of implementation (Company B), these benefits are the most obvious ones. When policies are in place for longer time periods (Company A), management are able to recognise additional positive effects on the business. This supports possibilities for the long-term development of work-life policies, if more businesses recognise that such policies can play a significant role in business success.

Use of flexibility due to **direct business benefits** has also been studied (see Chapter 3). In the present research, there was some evidence to support this. As Company A was planning to increase its business hours beyond the nine-to-five standard day, use of flexibility was anticipated to increase. Pure business benefits are likely to appear more readily in large-scale firm-level research, as such direct advantages vary with organisations and sectors. Thus, finding this example here was reasonable support for

this line of argument in the research framework, considering that only two organisations were studied. Thus, an increase in the use of flexibility in the long-term may arise from pure or direct business benefits, through such changes as globalisation and changing demand forces.

This behaviour of organisations can be partially explained through transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1981), and agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976; Ross, 1973). In recent literature on related topics, these perspectives have been used by other scholars to theorise organisational decisions about adoption of flexible benefits plans (Barringer and Milkovich, 1998), to understand reasons for introduction of family-friendly programmes (Dex and Scheibl, 2001), to explain decisions to adopt flexible work hours (Shepard, Clifton, and Kruse, 1996), and to support the idea that compensation packages should be designed to motivate employees to act in the best interest of the principal (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

The transaction cost theory explains that organisations establish structures minimising the costs of their transactions (the exchange of goods or services) with other parties (Williamson, 1981). Thus, as there is a demand for flexibility by the labour force, and business needs are changing, certain changes (such as opening hours beyond the nine-to-five), allow organisations to minimise transactional costs (such as costly overtime payments) through introducing flexibility which comes under the umbrella of employee-friendly flexible working. This approach is theoretically different from using flexibility purely to meet business needs (as argued by Atkinson and his followers; see Chapter 3), though in practice, a clear distinction may not be possible. Soft-benefits, like higher productivity, lower absenteeism and reduced turnover, result in greater efficiency and hence cost minimisation.

Through the agency theory perspective – that principals should provide incentives so that the agents act in the best interest of the principals (Ross, 1973) – providing flexibility in order to improve efficiency, productivity, and reduce turnover is arguably an incentive to make the employees work in the best interest of the employer.

This behaviour of organisations or its management has been interpreted as steps to increase efficiency gains (Dex and Scheibl, 2001; Barringer and Milkovich, 1998).

With a widespread belief in the benefits of flexible working by managers (Forth et al., 1997; Hogarth et al., 2001), and the view that flexible working is a low cost policy (Dex and Smith, 2002), it is easier to perceive why managers believe that it is in organisational interest to introduce such policies.

In summary, there were mixed findings about the initial assumptions. Though many arguments were partially supported, the findings were not conclusive. However, the research framework proved useful in understanding the changes relating to employees and employers that are likely to support the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working. Through the framework, it was also possible to view these several independent changes at the same time, indicating how various streams are joining to make this river. As this river originates from the collection of multiple streams, if one or the other of the streams dries up, the flow of this river may slow down, but the river will not turn dry.

Results relevant to the final part of the framework, which is about the negotiating power between the employee and the employer, are discussed in Section 9.3.

9.2.2 Beyond the research framework

Analysis of employee attitudes towards flexible working and work-life revealed some additional findings, which go beyond the boundaries created by the research framework. These include problems and controversies surrounding the use of the term ‘flexibility’, the importance of diversity in employee needs in designing work-life programmes, the presence of psychological barriers in the design and use of flexibility, the role of managers in the design and implementation of policies, and the formal and informal use of flexibility.

Flexible working is a vague term: In both organisations, full-time options like flexi-time and home-working were attractive to employees irrespective of their demographic sub-grouping, whereas reduced time options were associated with women and newer demographic groups. This variation in the absence or presence of difference on the basis of demographics for some options and not for others partly explains why researchers have had mixed findings when they have tried to establish relationships

between gender and flexibility, in which options are grouped together. For example, Ingram and Simons (1995) defined flexible working as flexi-time, work at home or paid paternity leave, while Goodstein (1994) included flexi-time, voluntary reduced time, job-sharing, work at home, flexible leave, or parental leave.

Thus, it is important to expand the meaning of the term in empirical research, and to recognise the problems in generalisation due to the complexity created through its unspecific use by others. Grouping options together may be contradictory, but if this is essential because of the research design, grouping reduced- and full-time flexible working separately may improve the consistency of results.

Diversity of employee needs: The diversity of employee needs was reflected through the association, or lack of association, between personal and work-related characteristics and different types of flexible work and extended leave options. While these findings have been discussed in detail in Section 9.2.1, they are briefly mentioned to highlight the need to recognise the diversity of employee attitudes and needs in designing work-life policies.

The presence of psychological barriers: In this study, various findings from the two organisations supported the presence of psychological barriers to the use of flexible working. Men were more interested in the newer reduced time options (voluntary reduced time and term-time working) compared with the traditional ones of part-time working and job-sharing. This indicates that, at least for some men, the hindrances to part-time working and job-sharing are not financial, as often assumed, but because these practices have been used by women for such a long time that people associate them just with women.

Psychological barriers were also reflected in attitudes towards the use of flexibility, particularly reduced time flexibility, in high-status jobs. The findings show that managers and professionals perceived that reduced time working was not available to them, even when the company policies did not differentiate on the basis of occupational groups. Some managers and employees indicated that high-status jobs could not be performed on a reduced time basis, or that it was degrading to such jobs if they were done on a reduced-time basis.

Most jobs in large organisations are not unique, and hence can be re-arranged to accommodate reduced working hours (Walton and Gaskell, 2001; Raabe, 1996). In the organisations studied, the physical absence of high-status employees, including managers, was acceptable under different circumstances (e.g. in virtual teams, or due to extended business hours), which supports the lack of actual barriers. Since low-status jobs have been performed on a flexible basis for longer, barriers towards the use of flexibility by employees in such jobs are lower.

While operational constraints (e.g. nature of clients, turnaround times) impose limitations on the use of flexible working (Scheibl and Dex, 1998), it is important to distinguish the psychological barriers from the operational ones. Use of such terms in management interviews as ‘loss of control’, ‘a bit of fear’, ‘easier to monitor’, ‘too much effort to change’ indicate that part of the problem in expanding the use of flexibility is ideological barriers and the reluctance to change. Similar terms have been cited by other authors in their empirical work (Lewis and Taylor, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Rapoport et al., 2002). Similarly, culture, values, attitudes and norms have been often used as reasons to explain reluctance to offer flexibility and its low take-up (Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Daniels, 2000; Rapoport et al., 2002, Bailyn and Rayman, 1998; Lewis, 2001; The Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001; DfEE 2000; DTI, 2000).

Recognising the limitations of other research methods to understand barriers to change in expansion of work-life policies, a group of US researchers has defined the ‘action research’ method to study work-life policies (Rapoport and Bailyn, 1998; Bailyn and Rayman, 1998; Rapoport et al., 2002). These scholars have stressed the need to look beyond the concepts of ideal work, ideal worker, ideal leaders, and a culture bound definition of success, challenging beliefs about hierarchy and control, focusing on changing structures and culture.

These psychological and ideological barriers are discussed further in Section 9.3 and in Chapter 10.

The role of managers deserves special attention. They are employees, employers, and gatekeepers at the same time. In the role of employees, they faced the highest conflict.

and among the occupational groups they were least likely to feel that flexibility could or did improve balance between the two main domains of their lives. Their negative attitudes and prejudice against flexibility are filtered through in the design and implementation of policies.

In Company A, despite the existence of formal policies and guidelines, managers' attitudes restricted implementation. This is a reflection on the role of managers as gatekeepers, influencing working practices and culture, as observed by Pettigrew (1973; 1985). It also points towards the problem of designing policies at macro level, where their implementation depends upon micro-level process dynamics. Such issues arise in, for example, the contrast between the formal and informal organisation, and notions of emergent strategy.

Similarly, in Company B, managers (as employers) had reservations about expanding the use of flexible working to all employees (Section 7.3), and had been able to deal with flexible working requests from employees on an informal basis for a long time. The expansion and formalisation of policies is expected to occur at just their head-office on one work-site. This indicates how managers are deciding what is on the agenda and what is not (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962, 1970).

The distinct role of managers is being recognised in the design and implementation of work-life policy. Some researchers have identified them as the group who have been pushed hard by an increasingly competitive market place, thus facing difficulty balancing their work and family life (Rapoport et al., 2002). Others indicate that stress and long-hours are considered to be a part of certain high-status jobs (Dex and Smith, 2002; Hogarth et al., 2001). It is also recognised that introducing flexibility may increase their workload (Hogarth et al., 2001; Gottlieb et al., 1998). Appropriate training for managers is increasingly being recommended (Gottlieb et al., 1998; Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001; Bailyn and Rayman, 1998), as the support of all management levels for true implementation is being recognised (Bailyn, 1993; Rapoport et al., 2002; Dex and Scheibl, 2001).

This study has also highlighted distinctions between the view of male and female managers. These differences existed in their role as employees and employers. Female

managers were more likely to find flexibility useful for themselves, and were more supportive of the expansion of flexibility for all than their male counterparts. The study was unable to explore this distinction further, but as more females enter managerial roles, the influence of these female employers and gatekeepers on introduction and true implementation of policy should be studied.

Formal and informal policies: The research has supported the idea that to comprehend the role of flexible working as a work-life policy requires an understanding of its formal and informal use (Holt and Thaulow; 1996; Lewis and Taylor, 1996).

Whether the use of policy was formal or informal was found to influence power relationships – informality increased managerial discretion. However, greater managerial discretion cannot always be taken as an indicator of greater managerial power, as employee groups with higher power (such as the higher skilled) may be able to obtain their desired flexibility even with informal policies (Company B). It can be summarised that formality improves the bargaining position of all employees, where as informality makes individual's personal and work-related characteristics more influential. Nevertheless, even with formal policies (Company A), the effects of managerial discretion and employee characteristics were observed on use of policy, though this influence was less than in Company B.

9.3 POWER RELATIONSHIPS AFFECTING THE LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEE-FRIENDLY FLEXIBLE WORKING

Power is the focal point of the present study. The research framework (Figure 3.1) hypothesises that long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working depends on the negotiating power of the employee versus the employer. To understand power relationships, the influences of a number of factors on power were explored directly through the employee survey, management interviews, or both. These included centrality and difficulty in substitutability of employee groups [H2](Hickson et al., 1971), the ability of individuals to accomplish their will [H3](Giddens, 1979), and multiplicity of constituent demands [H4](Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991).

The findings establish that demographics and the balance between skill demand and supply influences the negotiating power of employees, because these increase the ability of individuals to accomplish their will. However, the change started by these groups is increasing the power of all individuals, by increasing knowledge and lowering ideological barriers. The power of all employees is also influenced positively because there are no conflicts between employee demands.

In the managerial interviews, changing business needs and external factors were explored to understand their impact on the employee-employer power relationship. The external factors discussed included influences from other organisations and countries, the political climate in the UK, economic cycle, and changing social values. Results suggest the positive influence of these factors on long-term development of policies.

This section starts by explaining results in light of the key power-related research hypotheses [H2-H4] and then moves on to engage in a debate on the wider power dynamics.

In understanding the power dynamics, the idea of the power of employee-groups based on their ability to take action [H3] or because of their centrality and difficulty in substitutability [H2] was partially supported.

Support for the hypothesis that individuals belonging to groups who are willing to take action to achieve their desired balance (or who have taken action in the past) will have greater negotiating power, through the perception that failure to accommodate their desires will result in a strong reaction [H3] was supported through studying women (with children), as anticipated.

Support for H3a – that women (with children) will have greater ability to accomplish their will – was reflected in women's greater willingness to take pay cuts and to vote with their feet. In this research we have measured 'power to accomplish their will' through these two ideas in the survey. However, women's indication to accomplish their will is a latent demand, and the results should be viewed critically. Nevertheless, the perception exists that these groups will take action if their desires are not accommodated (Hogarth et al., 2001; Lewis and Lewis, 1999).

As discussed in Section 9.1 and 9.2, women have greater access to part-time and other reduced time options in this study and others. In Company A, where a large proportion of women were working part-time, it was not possible to establish through the survey data whether this was through their own choice as opposed to the employers'. Such a question, though included in the survey, did not produce reliable results (see Section 4.6). As women did not have greater access to other widely used flexible working options like flexitime, the support for the hypothesis that women will have greater access to flexible working options from the survey was partial.

Managerial interviews clearly supported the ability of certain demographic groups to accomplish their will to their better bargaining position. Discussions with managers on the process of introduction and expansion of work-life policies highlighted the role of women, particularly those with young children. As in many other organisations, the initiation of (some) policies was to retain these females, and thus supports the idea of power through the ability to act.

In Company A, where organisational policies did not differentiate on the basis of demographics, in day-to-day practice, women, especially those with young children, could be (and usually were) favoured in the implementation of policy. Some managers were more sympathetic towards their requests, while others accepted that these policies were essential to attract and retain employees who may not work otherwise.

Company B offered occasional part-time working in the return-from-maternity-leave category. Organisational reluctance to offer reduced time working was causing a high turnover of women returning from maternity leave. The organisation was in the process of changing its accountancy system at the time of the research so that it could accommodate more request for part-time work. This is an example of the power of people, gained through their ability/willingness to take action, to change organisational structures and routines. Since the Company B sample is largely formed of high-status employees, the high status females represent the interaction of the two main arguments of power – the ability to act and power on the basis of centrality and difficulty in substitutability.

This study has not made the distinction between partnered women with children and lone mothers. The interviewees did not differentiate between the two groups in their

comments. Further, the number of lone mothers in the sample ($n=6$ for Company A and $n=2$ in Company B) did not allow a separate analysis. However, strong responsibilities outside the workplace can make both these groups take action. National statistics show that lone mothers are more likely to leave paid work (Brannen et al., 1997; Tate, 1997), and thus are more likely to act as a trigger for long-term change though influencing the institutional environment (Section 10.1). Partnered women often have a cushion from their partner's income, and their ability to act results in different repercussions for the workplace and the environment.

The hypothesis [H2] that organisations are more likely to accommodate employee desire for flexible working if the pressure to provide such policies comes from employees whose skills and knowledge are central and difficult to substitute was partially supported by the interviews. The evidence from the survey data was contradictory.

In general, statistics from either of the two companies did not indicate that high-status employees were more likely to have access to flexible working option except some extended leave options. For many reduced time options, such employees perceived that flexibility was not available to them (Company A). However, the survey data indicated that the high-educated, higher-income, managerial and professional employees believed themselves to be more difficult to replace. Interpreting the statistical results through managerial discussion, the greater bargaining power that high-status employees (may) have is offset against (perceived) incompatibility of their jobs with flexibility. High-status jobs were considered to be less compatible with flexibility, especially reduced-time flexibility than low-status ones.

However, managerial interviews in Company B supported H2, H2a and H2b. Software engineers with scarce skills were able to work from home. Power on the basis of skills and knowledge was also evident in the manner in which Company B was introducing flexible working policies, differentiating between the high-status head-office employees, and the manufacturing employees, who are low-skilled.

Thus, greater bargaining power [H2a] and hence greater access to desired flexible working options [H2b] is dependant on the context in which the power is being exercised. Nevertheless, the absence of differences in the use or availability of (full-

time) flexible working options indicates that the argued influence of power-from-status – which was supported through theory and managerial interviews – was not marked enough to create clear differences between sub-groups. However, other researchers have found some associations between high-status and availability of certain types of flexible working (Gottlieb, Kelloway and Barham, 1998; Forth et al., 1997; Dex and Smith, 2002). Dex and Smith (2002) have labelled these acts as ‘cherry picking’. Not surprisingly, most of the associations between high-status and greater access to flexible working arrangements relate to female high-status employees. However, high status men have also been found to have access to some options, e.g. homeworking (Dex and Smith, 2002). On the other hand, some researchers have failed to find such associations (Hogarth et al., 2001).

Before discussing the results further, we reflect on reasons why more support for our key hypothesis on power came from the managerial interviews than the survey. The data from the survey was cross-sectional and thus not suitable to express how demographics, the ability to act, or high-status influenced power over time. However, the survey data provided insight into power relationships when analysed with the interview data, or when discussed during interviews.

Further, the idea that employee-friendly flexibility was introduced for women, then moved on to working parents, and is now shared by all employees is recognised to various degrees by work-life scholars (Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Gottlieb et al, 1998; Daniels, 2000; Rapoport et al, 2002; Hogarth et al, 2001, Dex and Smith, 2002). We argue that the strong desire for flexibility among all employees masked group-differences.

Overall, empirical data from this project indicates that when policies are in the initial stages of development and informal (Company B), individuals belonging to certain demographic groups, and those with scarce skills, are most likely to be the ones to initiate the flexible working debate, and are more likely to get preferential treatment if they want to work flexibly. When policies are formalised (Company A), differentiation still exists in the implementation stage, but can become less marked.

Thus it is argued that demography and skills increase the ‘personal’ power of individuals. That is, these factors influence the ‘personal’ power of ‘an individual’

depending on his/her circumstances and values at a point in time. Other factors may influence the 'collective' power of 'all individuals', and a discussion on power will benefit from the differentiation between 'personal' and 'collective' power. Personal power is seen to act as a trigger, to stimulate an increase in collective power; while collective power is more likely to influence long-term change. Also, once 'personal' power has triggered 'collective' power, the influence of personal power may decrease.

Before moving on, it is important to revisit the concept of 'personal' power based on demographics. The groups which are implied to possess this power are traditionally among the least powerful in the society. However, as elaborated earlier (see Section 3.5), the dimension of power being discussed in this study does not make the individual powerful but creates a position of power at a point in time for a particular action. This power is not about domination or subordination, but is about an action, whose consequences in the larger organisational, social, cultural and institutional context gives it a meaning different to what this action would be if viewed in isolation.

Understanding personal power on the basis of demographics and skills, it is not difficult to conceive why researchers have often cited changing demographics and skill shortages as factors likely to influence the use of flexible working in the future. It was with these ideas that the research framework for the present study was constructed. In the preliminary phase of the study, even the collective power of individuals was only an extension of the factors now considered to be personal power factors. That is, the collective power of individuals was seen to increase in terms of the following propositions:

- Since newer demographic groups are more likely to desire flexibility, and the proportion of employees from these groups is on the increase, the desire for flexible working will increase.
- Since growth is more likely to be in higher skilled jobs, and employees in the future are likely to be highly skilled, more employees will be able to demand flexible working.

While these collective power arguments appear valid in the light of the results, they are also incomplete. Employee attitudes, irrespective of their personal or work-related characteristics, reflect individuals' desire for flexibility. In the initial stages, the greater personal power of some individuals, due to demography and/or scarce skills, acts as a

trigger to stimulate the wider power of employees. Through their own personal power, such employees are increasing **knowledge**, and lowering **ideological barriers**, which increase the collective power of all individuals.

The fourth key hypothesis of this research relates to the collective power. It proposed that the lack of polarisation of attitudes among employee groups to the availability of flexible working for others increases employee power through strengthening the impact of employees' demands because of the absence of multiplicity of demand (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). There was little indication of negative attitudes towards increasing flexibility in the two case-studies. Other surveys also indicate that a large proportion of employees would like more flexibility for themselves and for others (Gottlieb et al., 1998; Hogarth et al., 2001). Thus, organisations are more likely to accommodate employee pressure for flexible working as demands are uniform and widespread.

Other results which are argued to increase the collective power of employees is that a large proportion of employees was willing to take action (Giddens, 1979; Foucault, 1977, 1980; Hatch, 1996) to achieve work-life balance. That is, they were ready to take pay cuts, and/or change jobs to improve their work-life balance. However, employee readiness to take action is a latent expression, and all respondents were employees of organisations, which questions the reliability of these findings. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter of workers in Company A were part-time workers, and there was a large unmet demand for reduced time options in Company B which was leading to a greater turnover. Further, national surveys have also indicated that there is a great unfulfilled desire for flexibility among employees (Hogarth et al, 2001). Finally, the availability of alternatives, through more organisations offering flexibility, increases the possibility of this employee demand being translated into action.

On the organisational side, **changing business needs** are influencing individual's ability to work flexibly. In Company A, extended business hours beyond the nine-to-five are likely to increase the power of individuals. Thus, the personal power of individuals working in jobs or organisations which require flexibility (e.g. due to longer opening hours) increases. When these individuals work flexibly, they increase knowledge and lower ideological barriers, increasing the collective power of all individuals.

The compatibility of flexible working with jobs is also increasing. In Company B, head-office jobs were considered more compatible with employee-friendly flexibility, compared with manufacturing jobs. It is office-jobs which are on the increase. However, differentiation between actual and perceived compatibility is central to increasing use.

‘Knowledge’ appeared as a key word in outlining the future of flexible working – knowledge of the employer, regarding how flexibility can work, and knowledge of the employee, of what it is possible for the organisation to offer. This role of knowledge has been recognised by other work-life researchers (Rapoport et al., 2002; Haas and Hwang, 1995; Raabe, 1996). We argue that distinguishing between actual and perceived incompatibility becomes possible for the employee and the employer through this knowledge. This knowledge is likely to change the attitudes of line managers and lower psychological barriers. It is also likely to give employees greater power, since it enables more employees to desire and demand flexible working. This discussion on knowledge is continued in Chapter 10.

Finally, the collective power of employees, and the probability of long-term development in employee-friendly flexible working is increasing due to favourable **external factors**. Consistency between external pressures and the demands of employee groups is creating a unified force, increasing pressure upon organisations (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991), and making it more difficult to avoid work-life policies.

In both organisations, the largest external influence has been what other organisations are doing, within the UK, and internationally. Copying practices in this manner, through greater awareness and knowledge of policies, has been often observed in the study of organisations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have labelled this the ‘mimetic’ behaviour of organisations.

Managers in both organisations also faced external pressures from legislation and public opinion, to accommodate the work-life needs of employees. These pressures not surprisingly influenced the adoption of policies, since it is well documented that response to institutional pressures and demands improves the chances of organisational

survival. This observation is common to a number of perspectives on organisations – for example, both institutionalist (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and resource dependence (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) theorists.

Both organisations thus had a positive attitude towards external influences. The reason for this was that managers perceived the benefits of responding to these external influences, through improved resource allocation (by attracting and retaining best employees), and enhanced social fitness. Companies may differ in their response to institutional pressures, however (Oliver, 1991), and the factors which influence variations in work-life policies are discussed in Section 9.3 below.

This discussion on the long-term development of work-life policies is incomplete without considering the effects of the **economic cycle**. A prolonged economic peak over the last few years (1993-2001) can be considered a favourable external pressure. A recession is likely to reduce the power of employees. It reduces the difficulty in replacing employees (Hickson et al., 1971), and makes it difficult for them to accomplish their will (Giddens, 1979) by producing a surplus workforce. However, other factors are not affected. These include changing demographics, the desire (not demand) of employees, changed business needs, and social and legislative pressures. Increased knowledge and lowered ideological barriers are also relatively irreversible changes.

Some additional points should be kept in view when analysing the effects of the economic cycle on work-life policies. First, a recession increases the supply of human resources, but the ‘best’ human resources will always be a scarce resource. Second, employee-friendly flexible working policies are not costly. In fact, managers perceive them to be a low-cost accommodation of employees’ work-life needs. Finally, as the use of flexibility becomes common practice, and it is integrated into the culture and working practices of organisations (e.g. Company A), the effects of recession are reduced. The long-term progress of flexible working policies, through their integration into the organisational culture and their overcoming of preconceived ideas from the industrial era on how work should be done, are discussed further in Chapter 10.

It is useful once again to visualise a river formed through the merging of multiple streams. As the sources of this river are traced, additional streams (increasing

knowledge, the lowering of psychological barriers) emerge and join in with the more obvious ones of changing business needs and external factors. Some of these streams may dry up (economic recession), and influence the strength of flow, but the river is likely to continue to flow because of its many sources.

9.4 DIFFERENCES IN ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSES TO WORK-LIFE POLICIES

Variation in the results from the two case studies throw light on the differences in organisational response to work-life policies. Comparing employee and employer perceptions of the relative roles of individuals, organisations, government and other institutional forces in providing work-life balance, this section develops a new framework. This framework helps understand whether all organisations in the future will help their employees achieve a better balance, or whether some organisations will be able to choose to ignore or defy such demands and desires. Managerial attitudes towards the use of flexible working and work-life, and employee power in relation to management, are the two key factors influencing the use of working practices in the future, with external factors playing a mediating role.

This section starts by comparing the empirical data from the two companies, and then speculates on future possibilities, with the aid of a new framework and a matrix of possible responses. While the original framework (Figure 3.1) helped understand changes on multiple fronts to understand intra-organisational dynamics, which were then placed in the context (Figure 6.1), the focus of discussion of the original framework was changes in organisations. The framework presented in this section highlights differences between organisations and is a part of theory development. It is presented as a basis for further research, accepting possibilities for improvement, since it is based on only two case-studies.

Comparing empirical data: Comparing employer perceptions of the relative roles of individuals, organisations, government and other institutional forces in providing work-life balance, managers in Company A believed that the organisation and employees were the main influences on the development of work-life policies. The role of government was considered secondary, and external pressures only had an indirect

effect. However, in Company B, managers believed that government had the most important role, and individuals had the responsibility to be the agents of change. The role of management was seen to be more passive. Managers in Company B also reported direct pressure from external factors. Two of the main reasons for these differences are the different stages of development of policies in the two companies and managerial attitudes. Both these factors are internal to the organisation. However, the differences between Company A and B may also be because of period effect, with Company B bringing about the changes in a time of greater institutional pressures. Thus, the response of Company A was proactive, while that of Company B reactive. This partially reflects managerial attitudes. Also, the two companies are trying to attract a different labour force. Organisations with a higher female proportion are known to offer more employee-friendly options, and Company A had a high proportion of females, which can partially explain the proactive attitude of management. On the other hand, Company B had a large proportion of high status employees, and such organisations are also known to have a more active interest in provision of policies.

Thus, in the initial stages of development, or until the organisation reaches a certain stage in (Company B), the role of government and other external influences are more important than management. As policies develop and/or the management is prepared to take a more active role (Company A), the effects of external influences are likely to decrease.

Despite differences in management attitudes, both organisations studied consider themselves to be employee-friendly organisations. If work-life balance is not on the agenda of an organisation, the approach of its managers is likely to be more diverse. For example, they may consider work-life balance to be only the individual's responsibility; they could have a hostile attitude towards government policies in this area; and they may not see any role of organisations in this debate. In such conditions, the role that an organisation may be forced to play depends upon the power of the individuals in the organisation, and organisational dependence on external bodies.

Comparing employee attitudes in the two companies highlights the importance of the power of the individual. In both organisations, employees believed managers and employees to be the protagonists – the role of government was seen to be more passive.

This view is particularly significant in Company B, where managers found external influences to be significant, but employees did not. This is probably because the employees felt that they could influence management attitudes, either because the management was not hostile towards the idea of flexible working, and/or because the Company B sample was made up disproportionately of high-status employees. The low-powered manufacturing employees were not given the choice of flexibility, and probably would have to rely on legislative changes. Speculating from this, if there are only low-powered individuals in a hostile organisation, individuals and organisation are unlikely to be the two main parties in designating work-life policies – the role of government and other external pressures becomes more significant.

Overall, these findings provide support for the research framework (Figure 3.1), which focuses on the individual, the organisation and the power between these two parties. However, they also signify the importance of external factors (see Figure 6.1) in the long-term development of work-life policies.

A framework to understand differences in organisational response: On the basis of the above discussion, a supplementary framework (Figure 9.1) is developed which allows us to speculate how the relationships between the focal points of the original framework (Figure 6.1) are likely to vary under different circumstances. This framework helps understand how and why organisations differ in offering employee-friendly flexible working, and whether this difference is likely to continue in the future. A matrix of possible responses (Figure 9.2) is discussed.

The framework and the accompanying response matrix have the potential to form the basis of further research. The framework has already been tested out on two separate occasions with senior HR practitioners at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Forum meetings, who found great practical value in it.

In Figure 9.1, the dynamics between three factors – management attitudes towards flexible working and work-life, the power of employees in relation to management, and the influence of external factors – are considered to influence the negotiating power between the employee and the employer, and the resulting policies in organisations.

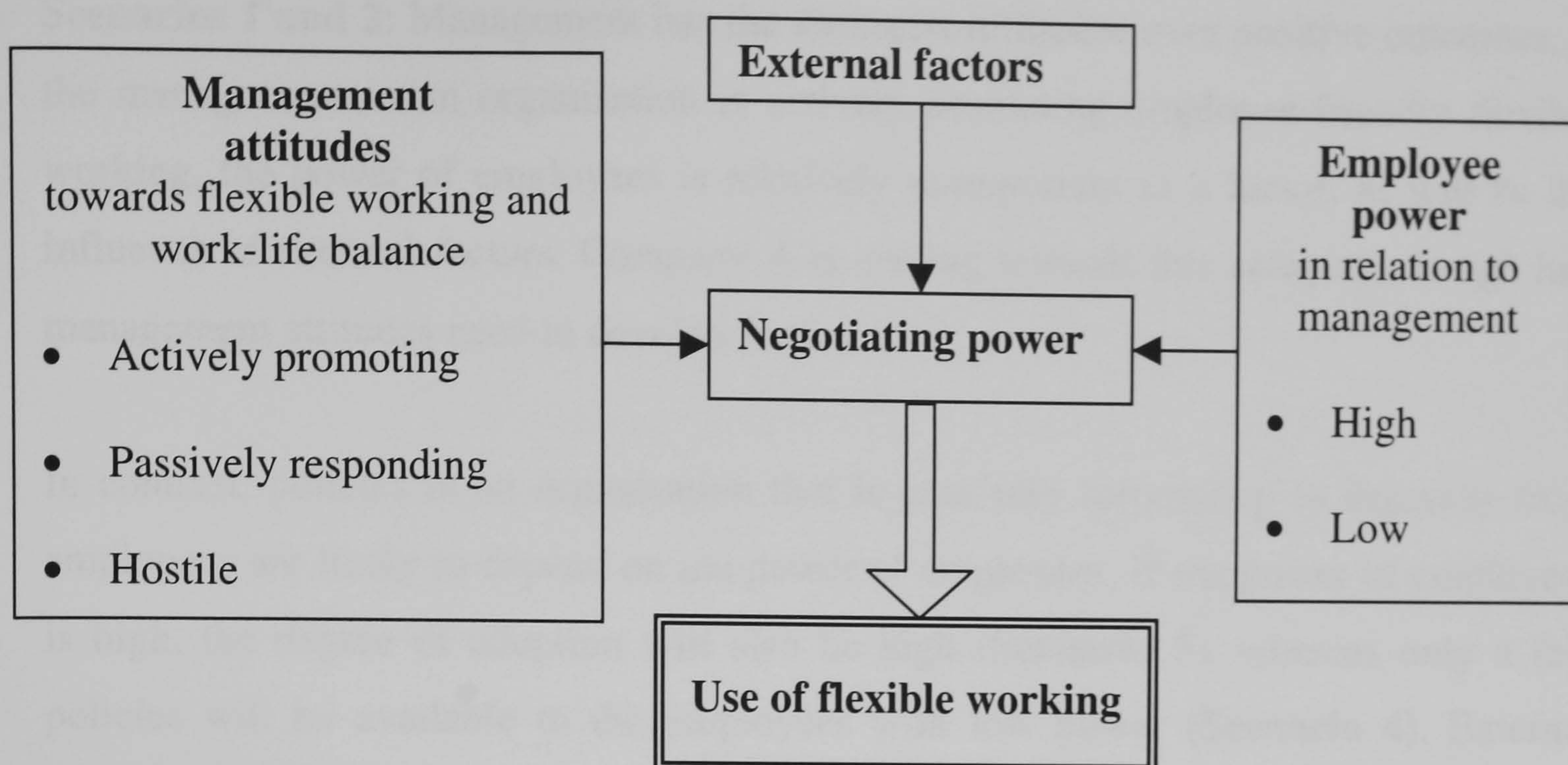


Figure 9.1: The organisational response framework

To explore the influence of these, three types of managerial attitudes are proposed – actively promoting, passively responding, and hostile. Two levels of employee power are identified – low and high. The power of employees is their ability to demand and obtain flexible working (Section 9.3). External factors act as a mediator in this framework. The scenarios that result from these changing dynamics are shown in Figure 9.2 and discussed below. This discussion adapts the view that, in general, employees would like more flexibility – this may not necessarily be always valid.

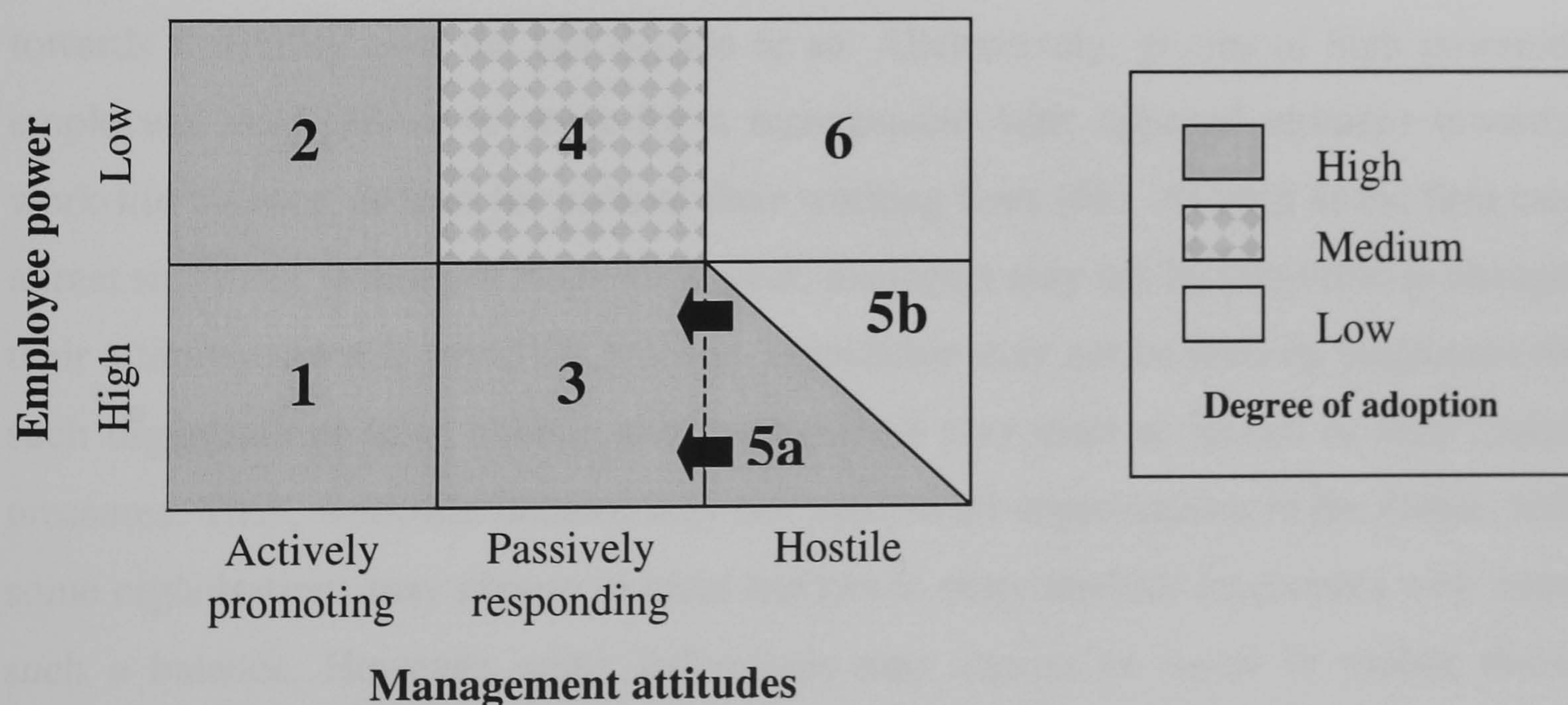


Figure 9.2: The organisational response matrix

Scenarios 1 and 2: Management has the strongest influence over positive outcomes. If the management in an organisation is actively promoting employee-friendly flexible working, the power of employees is relatively unimportant as a factor, as will be the influence of external factors. Company A is leaning towards this category, though line management attitudes need to develop further.

In contrast, policies in an organisation that is passively responding to demands from employees are likely to depend on the power of employees. If the power of employees is high, the degree of adoption will also be high (**Scenario 3**), whereas only a few policies will be available to the employees with low power (**Scenario 4**). External factors are likely to play a stronger role in developing policies in such organisations, and it is likely that these factors will dictate the extent of use in the fourth scenario. Company B is an example of both Scenario 3 and 4. In this organisation, the high-power head-office employees received preferential treatment over the low-power manufacturing employees, and the role of government and legislation was considered vital in influencing change.

Scenario 5 is a hostile management, but where employees have high power in relation to management. There are several outcome possibilities. Employees may be able to change management attitudes and shift them towards responding passively (**5a**⇒**3**). Perhaps this is the way in which employees have changed management attitudes towards flexibility over the last decade or so. Alternatively, groups of high powered employees may choose to work for a management with opposed attitudes towards work-life balance, at least for parts of their working lives (**5b**). As long as the firm can attract sufficient number of such employees, managers may not be pressured to change their attitudes towards work-life balance. Legislation may not be used by employees in such organisations from choice, and management may elect to ignore or defy social pressures. Thus, work-life balance may not exist in all organisations in the future, and some organisations may choose to erect barriers to entry towards employees who want such a balance. However, some individuals may choose to attack or violate these barriers. Investment banking can be used as an example to explain this scenario. (During exploratory interviews in the early part of the study, managers from the financial services sector often suggested incompatibility of investment banking with

flexible working, and also implied that these bankers entered their line of work with the knowledge that the demands of their work will take over their life).

The final case (**Scenario 6**) concerns low-powered employees in an organisation which has a hostile attitude towards employee-friendly flexible working policies. These employees are most likely to rely on external pressures to provide them with flexible working. Even then, organisations may find loopholes or choose to defy external pressures. Thus, these employees are least likely to find work-life balance for themselves.

Developing the organisational response framework: Organisational choice in response to internal and external factors is becoming a key research area. More research would be useful to develop, test or theorise further about the organisational response framework. The main ideas of this framework have their roots in the original framework (Figure 3.1), and the concepts have been elaborated throughout the thesis. In summary, managerial attitudes are influenced by understanding the advantage of flexible working as a family-friendly policy and the direct business benefits of using flexibility (which is also influenced by the organisational sector). The power of the employee is divided into two parts; personal and collective. Demographics, skills and personal knowledge influence the extent of personal power. The overall demand for flexibility in the organisation, the multiplicity of employee demand, the willingness/ability of employees to take action, and the knowledge of alternative possibilities influence collective power. Legislative developments, changing social values, policies offered by other organisations and stages of economic cycle are the key external factors.

In addition to the findings from this project, any further research using the organisational response framework and matrix may find Oliver's (1991) and Greenwood and Hinings's (1996) concepts of strategic response and intra-organisational dynamics helpful.

Oliver (1991) discusses organisational response to external institutional change and pressures in terms of types of response, from passive to active, and develops a typology to define these. In this thesis, use has been made of the concept of 'multiplicity of

demand' which Oliver adapts from Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), and there is some common ground in the analysis of causal effects and why organisations respond in the way they do. Oliver's typology may allow for some more in-depth treatment of institutional factors and organisational response.

Greenwood and Hinings (1996) introduce an elegant model for understanding organisational change which brings together different bodies of theory. Our study develops a model which is built upon some of the same basic assumptions, including ideas from the strategic contingencies theory of intra-organisational power (to which Hinings was a contributor). Our model is developed with more specific application to a particular issue. As a result of this, it develops greater insights into the micro-processes of power and organisational/social change – specifically the role of management as a 'gatekeeper' and actor in the adoption of policies for work-life balance.

Thus, while the thesis and Greenwood and Hinings' model both consider the impact of external institutional and market context on internal organisational dynamics and power distribution, and the feedback processes of external developments over time, the thesis is more sensitive to the actual working through of these processes, because it is more actor-centred. Further research might add these elements from the thesis to the Greenwood and Hinings model to explore other kinds of issue, with a view to establishing a more complete generic theoretical model.

9.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has highlighted the main findings of the project. The two case studies support the long-term development of work-life policies, as a combination of internal and external factors is increasing pressure upon organisations to provide such programmes.

The original research framework (Figure 3.1) proved useful to combine and understand the multiple changes in individuals and organisations which are influencing employee and employer attitudes. These include alterations in the demographic composition of the workforce, changes at work, and increasing work-family conflict. From the organisational perspective, organisations are offering flexible working because of its benefits as a family-friendly policy, and/or because of direct business advantages.

Power is the focal point of the study, and its dynamics also promote the long-term development of policies. Changing demographics and skill demands/shortages have acted as a trigger to initiate the use of work-life policies in organisations. However, the change started by these groups is increasing the power of all individuals, through changing attitudes, increasing knowledge, and lowering ideological barriers. External factors are favourable for the further expansion of policies, as they are positively influencing employee power, and are exerting pressure on organisations to accommodate employee needs.

However it is also suggested that, although the use of employee-friendly policies is predicted to increase in the future, not all organisations may provide them. A supplementary framework and six scenarios are presented which help identify organisations that will have high, medium, or low adoption.

The research has also highlighted additional issues surrounding flexible working, which are summarised in this chapter. These include the vague and misleading nature of the term ‘flexibility’, the importance of diversity of employee needs in designing work-life programmes, the presence of psychological barriers in the design and use of flexibility, the role of managers in the design and implementation of policies, and the influence of formal or informal use of flexibility on the employee-employer relationship.

The next and final chapter reflects on the history of work-life policies to suggest what may happen in the future.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study has been to understand the possibilities for the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working. The key hypothesis was that this will be significantly affected by the relative negotiating power of employee and employer. The objective of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of change, and how these have been constituted, are constituted now, and may be in the future, so as to promote (or inhibit) work-life policies.

Arguments are presented to support why it appears that work-life will play a significant role in changing historical patterns of work. Two sections develop this line of discussion. The first chronologically charts developments in the work-life area in the past and present, leading us to the future. The second stresses the power of knowledge, of the employee and of the employer, of new possibilities and aspirations. Tracing the history of industrial capitalism, it is explained why this knowledge is a key factor in understanding the future of work – one can only begin to understand the future by exploring the past.

In the third section, it is argued whether work-time is, or should be, socially or economically constructed, to understand if flexibility can be employee-friendly. These arguments develop a theme of social change, which is discussed in the fourth section.

The chapter concludes by outlining the contributions of the research project, and providing recommendations for further research.

While Chapter 9 was a discussion of results directly derived from the data, in this chapter some key ideas are developed further. These discussions allow us to theorise towards the possibilities for the long-term development, an aspect which cannot be addressed by data alone. Parts of the discussions in this chapter are a reflection of the close links of the research topic to policy and practice.

10.1 LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEE-FRIENDLY FLEXIBLE WORKING – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Research by other scholars, and the trends discussed in the present study, indicate that employee-friendly flexible working is a long-term trend. This section discusses its past, present and future, outlining forces that have gradually increased the significance of its use, and speculating how and why this momentum is likely to increase in the future.

While the discussion is not directly derived from the empirical research, parts of managerial interviews which related to understanding the process of change within case-study organisations – how it started and where it is leading – influenced ideas developed in this section.

Parts of this discussion are supported by the ideas of other scholars, who in their research have presented arguments to understand the process of change. The general point about which there is agreement is the fact that this process began as a response to working mother. Gonyea and Googins (1996) have highlighted how now it is being framed by a whole new set of social and economic realities, while Lewis, Watts and Camps (1996) have discussed, through a case-study, how the focus shifted from maternity leave, towards productivity, the business case, the ethical investment movement, towards men's needs for family-time, to the culture of long hours. Dex and Smith (2002) draw attention to the pressure created by demographic changes which have resulted in further institutional pressures from government and pressure groups.

Figure 10.1 provides a graphical representation of the triggering forces, and their effect on the development of new way of working. The model shows a series of factors which are external to the organisation. These are divided into two groups: **Changes in the labour market** (women, women with young children, skills shortages, men from dual career households, and all employees), and **changes in the institutional environment** (pressure groups, social awareness, and legislation and government interest). Labour market and environmental changes are inter-related, with **society influencing individuals, and individuals influencing the society** (Giddens, 1979; Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

The model also shows a series of factors which are internal to organisations, which include **demand forces, technological changes, 24/7 hours working, and the changing nature of work.** At the beginning of the time-line, **a few policies are offered as benefits to marginalised workers,** and then, **increasing number of policies are offered to greater number of people.** As we move into the future, creation of a **social movement,** and development of **new models** generate knowledge. The model is discussed in detail in this section.

The most appropriate point to start the discussion is the beginning of the seventies, and the inter-related changes in the labour market and the external environment. With the influx of **women, especially women with young children,** into the labour market, organisations started offering a few policies (primarily part-time working) to these marginalised workers. Outside organisations, **pressure groups** started to form, to protect the rights of these workers, and more importantly, to create an awareness of influences on society and future generations if working mothers were not provided with options to balance work and personal lives. As awareness increased, the proposals to help working mothers were broadened to include all working parents.

An additional pressure then built up around the mid-nineties, namely **skill-shortages.** Although skill shortages were only in a few selected areas, employers began to expand the type of options they provided, and the range of employees to whom these were offered. The perceived role of flexible working changed. Flexibility was no longer about childcare, but about the bargaining power of employees to negotiate their terms of employment. Stress, workload, and responsibilities, which had all been increasing over the last decade or so, gained greater recognition in this argument, and increased its momentum.

Legislative changes, because of EU directives and the Labour **Government's interest** in flexible working, have raised the profile of employee-friendly flexible working. The Employment Relations Act 1999, The Working Time Regulations 1999, The Maternity and Parental Leave, etc. Regulations 1999, The Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, and Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice, 2000 are some recent legislative changes. The setting up of the National Work-Life Forum and the Work-Life Challenge Fund, the issuing of separate guidelines to

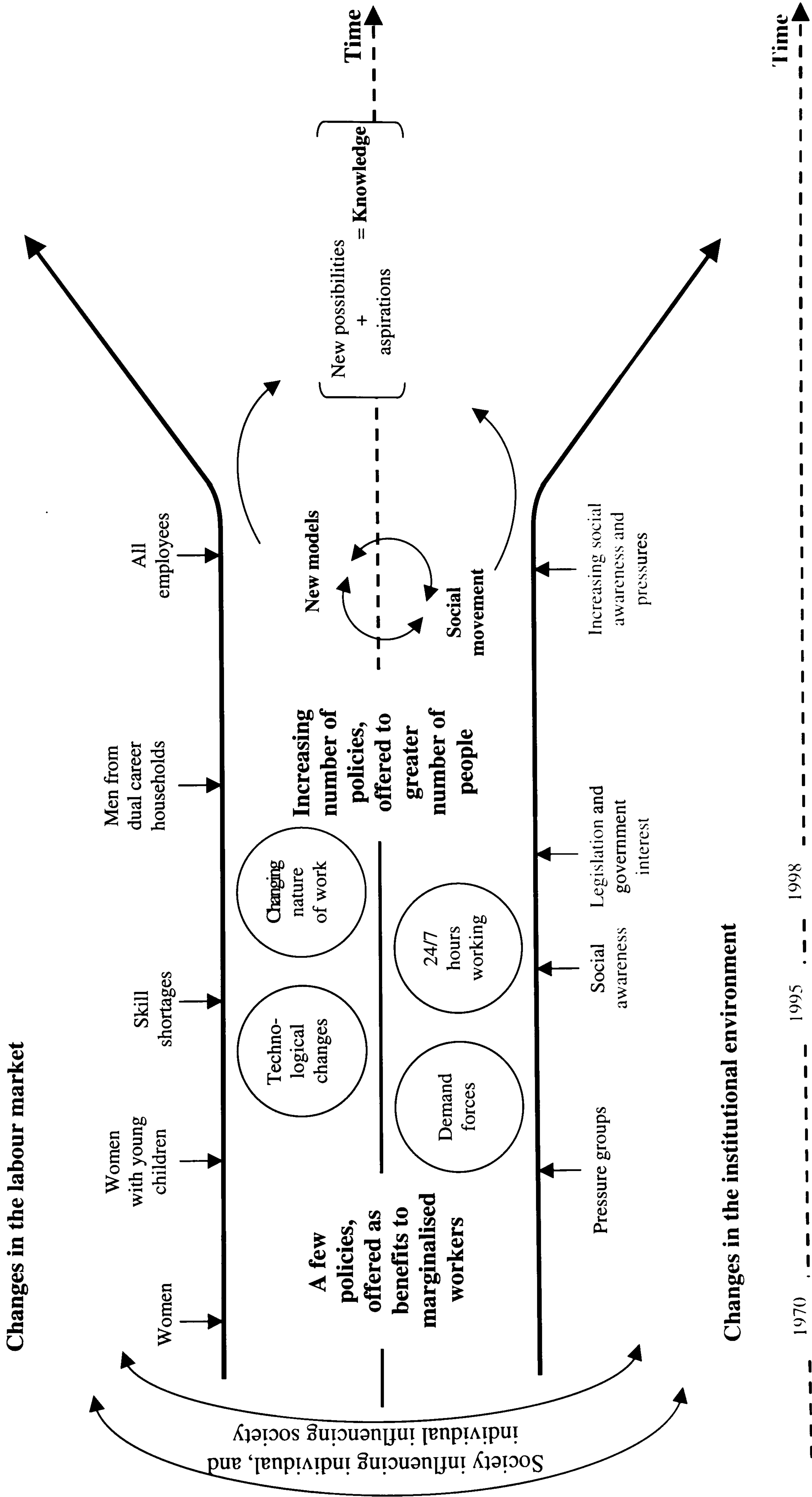


Figure 10.1: Chronological charting of the changes affecting new ways of working

improve work-life balance by the DfEE and DTI, and inclusion of flexible working and work-life issues in the WERS 1998 survey (Cully et al., 1999) and the DfEE baseline study of work-life balance practices in Great Britain (Hogarth et al., 2001) are some examples indicating government interest in these issues. The most recent in this string of developments is The Work and Parents Taskforce (2001), and its recommendation of the right of employees to request flexible working arrangements.

At the present time (2001), institutional pressures are strong, and gaining momentum. Labour market pressures are also growing, with **men** joining women and **all employees** joining working parents in their desire for flexible working. Consequently, increasing number of policies are being offered to a greater number of people.

Thus, labour market and institutional changes have influenced past and present in the use of flexible working. But what has been the role of the organisation? Back in the early 1970s, when a few policies were offered as benefits to marginalised workers, organisations could have provided more resistance to the developing external pressures. While some resisted or ignored these pressures, others initiated more flexible working. This was because some organisations perceived direct business benefits from the use of flexibility. Example of such benefits are the ability to extend business hours as a result of customer/client demands (**demand forces**), or because of increasing globalisation, which makes **24/7 hours working** essential. Organisations also accommodated employee demands for flexibility because it was possible for them to do so, without negatively influencing organisational routines and procedures. This was due to **technological changes**, and the **changing nature of work**. Also, the changing nature of work, with work intensification and output rather than input being more important, has made employers rethink the advantages and disadvantages of flexibility.

The impact of the internal factors discussed varies significantly between industrial sectors. Thus, sectors where the influence of these forces is stronger (e.g. Financial Services, Retail, Engineering and Telecommunications) are among the leaders in providing flexibility. However, this does not imply that organisations in other sectors are not likely to provide flexible working. As momentum grows, and new models of working are identified and tested by leading-edge organisations, more employees are likely to demand flexibility and more organisations are likely to provide it.

Figure 10.1 shows a dynamic relationship between **social movement** and **new models**. This illustrates how the growing momentum of internal and external pressures is creating the atmosphere of a social movement. Simultaneously, in organisations, new models to arrange work are being tested. In the future, the development of a social movement, and the success of new models of working is likely to increase **knowledge** of new possibilities and aspirations. When this happens, a true post-industrial society will be created.

Before discussing the role of knowledge we might pause to consider whether work-life is a social movement (or one in the making). The building up of pressure and momentum, the gathering of interest groups, and the associations with other social movements such as feminism, suggest parallels between work-life and social movements. In terms of Hobsbawm's (1959) classification – that a social movement can be either reformatory or revolutionary – work-life appears to be a reformatory movement. Charting a social movement is of course difficult, especially when it is in the making. Someone standing by the side of a river, who has no knowledge of the path of the river, can never anticipate whether the river will break down into streams and disappear, keep flowing with the same intensity, or become stronger and wider.

One reason why it is difficult to understand work-life as a movement is that it is not an independent social movement, but a collection of sub-movements in the throes of development. Childcare, men demanding equality, and new social identities could be charted as components sub-movements. All these have a long way to go. If work-life is likely to be a phenomenon leading society from industrial to post-industrial ways of working, its gathering momentum could even qualify it as a revolutionary social movement.

Whether historians of the future will consider work-life as a social movement, and of what calibre and strength, with what outcomes, is unknown. What is known at this point in time is that an escalating series of pressures and forces are increasing the impact of work-life balance on the way we work.

10.2 POWER/KNOWLEDGE OF NEW POSSIBILITIES AND ASPIRATIONS

Continuing this argument, we identify the key role of the knowledge of new possibilities and aspirations in expanding the use of flexible working. This knowledge is equated with ‘power’ (a concept central to this research), such that we argue that the ‘power of knowledge’ will influence historical concepts of ‘working time’.

While increasing knowledge has been accepted as a way to increase the use of work-life policies (Rapoport et al., 2002; Haas and Hwang, 1996; Raabe, 1996), and culture, values, attitudes and norms are some terms used for barriers to change in the work-life literature (Lewis and Lewis, 1996; Bailyn, 1993; Daniels, 2000; Rapoport et al., 2002; The Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001; DfEE 2000; DTI, 2000), this section brings together the two ideas and views them through the lens of power. Thus, knowledge is identified as the source of power to overcome the resistance of ‘ideological hegemony’ – a term borrowed from the literature on power to expand the terms generally used in the literature on work-life.

The relationship between **knowledge and power** is a dimension of power often not visible (Lukes, 1974; Gramsci, 1971; Ranson et al., 1980; Foucault, 1977, 1980). In the present study, two phrases, ‘knowledge’ and ‘ideological barriers’, constantly appeared in connection with power. This relationship between ideology, power and knowledge is, indeed, more visible in situations like this, where change is in the process of occurring.

This view of power can be explained as follows. First, is the definition of ‘hegemony’ by Smart (1985, 1986), where he clarifies and reformulates Gramsci’s concept of ideological hegemony to include Foucault’s studies and Donzelot’s ideas:

Hegemony contributes to or constitutes a form of social cohesion not through force or coercion, nor necessarily through consent, but most effectively by way of practices, techniques, and methods which infiltrate minds and bodies, cultural practices which cultivate behaviours and beliefs, tastes, desires, and needs as seemingly naturally occurring

qualities and properties embodied in the psychic and physical reality (or 'truth') of the human subject. (Smart, 1986: 160)

A second perspective or contribution is the radical view of power, as defined by Lukes (1974):

'(shaping people's) perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they view it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial'. (Lukes, 1974:24)

And finally in the words of Ranson, Higgins and Greenwood (1980):

Power is most effective and insidious in its consequences when issues do not arise at all, when actors remain unaware of their sectional claims, that is, power is most effective when it is unnecessary. (Ranson et al., 1980:8)

Thus, perceptions of the incompatibility of flexibility with organisational routines and procedures, and the acceptance of nine-to-five routines, by both managers and employees, are indications of power. These views of knowledge and ideological barriers develop the discussion on power beyond the struggle between individuals and organisations. Organisations, managers and employees operate within an existing structure – a web of power relationships – developed through industrialisation. The development of these structures or the adoption of similar disciplinary techniques, were not caused by a grand plan, but because certain forms of techniques were available and known (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Clegg, Hardy and Nord, 1996). Now the knowledge of new possibilities and aspirations is starting to challenge these existing structures, and creating a phenomenon which is likely to gain momentum in the future.

Reflecting upon the history of work supports this. Work-life balance is not a new concept. Studies of the history of work since industrialisation paint a struggle over the

length of **working time**, and discipline and control over its use between capitalists and workers (Marx, 1954; Thompson, 1967; Braverman, 1974; Adams, 1995; Bridges, 1996). At the beginning of industrialisation, the struggle was by workers to retain work-life balance, which was a natural feature of the pre-industrial era. Gradually, however, demarcations between work and life were created.

Just as the working patterns for a post-industrial society are meeting ideological barriers, the transition from pre-industrial to industrial era was met with resistance. Jobs and the clock-time governance of work – which have been not just common practice, but an integral and defining part of identity and daily routines in the industrial era – shook the lives of 19th Century individuals.

When the change towards industrialisation started, people were deeply traumatised. The old way of life had had a stability and coherence that was very hard to give up. The new world of jobs was destroying the old interpersonal relations that defined social rights and obligations, and it was undermining the time honoured ways of interweaving home life and work life.

(Bridges, 1996).

Thompson (1967) paints stronger emotions in his account of time and work under industrial capitalism. For example, his reference to a worker's comments in a study by Wells and Warmington (1962):

*How could a man work like that, day after day, without being absent?
Would he not die?*

(Wells and Warmington 1962: 128)

Progressively, industrial ways of working became common – nothing less than an integral part of how work was done and the only widely available path to success and security. Although there was a struggle to shorten working time, the way in which work was done was not challenged. Work and life were considered as mutually exclusive.

However, it is important to remember that these structures and disciplinary techniques are not part of nature. They are a historical artefact (Bridges, 1996). Factors which influenced the development of the industrial era of time and its associated structures are

changing (Thompson, 1967; Bravermann, 1974; Bridges, 1996; Mulgan and Wilkinson, 1995; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Crompton, 1998; Rapoport et al., 2002).

Just as the change in working practices had to be wrested from the workers by the employers (Thompson, 1967; Reid, 1976), the reversal – employees drawing concessions from employers – is a reflection of the greater power of individuals in the post-industrial era. Intellectual capital, contained in individuals, is shifting power towards individuals, just as assets of the capitalists in the industrial era had shifted power in their direction.

However, one basic principle differentiates the transition from pre-industrialisation to industrialisation from the current change from industrialisation to post-industrialisation. The first was a process of economic transformation, occurring in the absence of social regulation (Tourine, 1971; Thompson, 1967); while in the second, sociological processes are less separable from macro economic factors. They are operating more in tandem. Without this linkage, the process of exploitation and resistance to exploitation, described by Thompson (1967) would be likely to be repeated.

10.3 IS FLEXIBILITY EMPLOYEE-FRIENDLY?

Throughout the research, the term employee-friendly flexible working has been used. This is controversial, given the historic use of this term, where flexible employees have been considered as the exploited workforce, and labelled as peripheral, secondary, and non-core. Here, we debate whether flexibility can be truly employee-friendly. After highlighting these well-known controversies, the discussion stimulates thinking about the lesser acknowledged problem of the compatibility of the post-industrial construction of working time with a better work-life balance.

The arguments in this section do not arise from the research carried out in this project. On the other hand, they challenge the basic idea behind the project, accepting that alternative views may, in fact do, exist on the possibilities for the long-term development of employee-friendly flexible working.

The term flexibility covers a variety of options (as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1). Employee insecurity, vulnerability, and the friendliness of these options varies, but most have an immense potential to be employee-friendly. However, in order to be so, the exploitation of and the ideological barriers and prejudice against flexible workers needs to be overcome. Thus, managerial attitudes are a key factor determining whether the term ‘employee-friendly’ can be associated with non-standard ways of working. However, irrespective of managerial attitudes, with any or every option, there is no simple dichotomy of relative advantages and disadvantages: these are identified by the worker’s preference (Nisbet, 1997).

Another factor influencing work-life balance possibilities through new ways of working is the autonomy given to the worker. Related to managerial attitudes, it is widely recognised as a factor which influences the family-friendliness of flexible working options. But the true recognition of autonomy requires a more thorough understanding of the possibilities it opens up, and the responsibilities it brings.

To begin with, one needs to grasp the post-industrial notion of time (Mulgan and Wilkinson, 1995; Adams, 1995). This time is different from the collective rhythms of industrialisation, or the individualised nature of the pre-industrial time. In the final era, time is once again individualised – hence flexibility. But the individualised beats are synchronised to the nano-seconds of the digital clocks, unlike the individualised pre-industrial time where synchronisation was based on beats of nature – changing seasons, days and nights.

In this digital era of time, if individuals are not given control over flexibility, they will be unable to synchronise their time with the time of significant others in their lives, i.e. their friends and family. Without better foresight and planning, communal activities, leisure and cultural activities will be influenced. Thus, the lack of co-ordination can disrupt work-life balance, rather than improve it.

At this point, Elchardus’s (1991) differentiation of flexibility *for* the worker on the one hand, and flexibility *of* the worker on the other, describes the dilemma for worker autonomy. While the former allows more control, the latter increases unpredictability, and hence decreases the possibilities of harmonisation between work and home life.

While flexibility *for* the workers appears to be genuinely employee-friendly, it increases employee choice, which brings the responsibility to select wisely. History shows that the industrial order has created a culture of material accumulation and emulation. Increased consumption has been a more powerful compensation for work than increased free time (Cross, 1995). Although this research and that of others (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3) has indicated that these values are changing, a mass change in practice is yet to be observed. Just as individualised working time creates the opportunity to improve the balance, it can provide the option to disrupt all balance for greater material accumulation. While this can be partly explained through the diversity of individual needs, the potential problem requires more thought.

Also, from the recent past and present we know that it is not true that work is the cost for which benefits are leisure and commodities (Lane, 1995). This is especially true for post-industrial jobs compared with repetitive jobs – the former have greater intrinsic motivation, challenge and enjoyment. Flexibility, by eroding home-work boundaries in such jobs, can increase the overlap of work into the personal life domain. Thus, while there is the obvious and often acknowledged danger of organisations exploiting less skilled workers, there is also the possibility of skilled, knowledge workers being exploited by the all-absorbing nature of their work.

This discussion does not imply that flexible working is not, or cannot be, employee-friendly, and improve the work-life balance of employees. In fact, its purpose is to outline problems, and stimulate thinking to overcome them. Attention is especially drawn to the possibility that an expansion in the use of employee-friendly flexible working options, without careful understanding and planning, can, under a worst case scenario, break work-life harmony rather than improve it. This can happen at an unconscious level. Forecasting, analysing, and planning for new working patterns may allow us to comprehend new possibilities and responsibilities, and improve their potential to balance work and life. To overcome potential problems, individuals, organisations, government, community, and society need to cooperate, since:

Failure to address the work-life challenge can lead to a costly and damaging downward spiral – a ‘vicious circle’. A positive response to

this challenge can have far-reaching benefits for all of us – a ‘virtuous circle’.

The National Work-Life Forum (2000)

10.4 THE NEED FOR A MACRO-CHANGE

To understand the long-term development of work-life policies, this study has compared its growing momentum to the flow of a river formed through the combination of various streams. As more streams join in, the river grows stronger. As the river originates through the combination of multiple streams, it also means that even if one of the originating sources dries up, the river will keep flowing because of the other streams. But it was also suggested that someone standing by the side of a river can never anticipate whether the river will disappear, keep flowing with the same intensity, or become stronger and wider. This is because the flow of a river also depends on the terrain through which it flows. For work-life, the values and ideologies of a society and its culture define the landscape.

This section outlines the role of government and society in facilitating macro-change. The government is already playing its role in developing work-life policies, through a wave of legislation, which has influenced the climate of opinion and put obligations on employers. But the barriers to change are strong. The presence of ideological hegemony, and the power/control over perceptions and cognitions may not allow work-life policies to flourish and bloom.

The section begins by summarising the primary process of macro-change. Then, the discussion elaborates ideological barriers, and the role of government in confronting these. The key to improve the vision of employers and employees, and change attitudes and culture is through increasing knowledge.

As discussed in Section 10.1, the UK government has introduced a series of legislative changes, and government departments are taking greater interest in developing the use of work-life policies, as a result of recognising the diverse needs of the workforce. However, the intensity of interest has also been high due to the presence of a part of the work-life social movement inside the government. Advocates of such policies,

including Margaret Hodge and Patricia Hewitt, have fought the battle of work-life outside and inside the government.

However, these developments are only the primary phase of the process of change – a clear recognition that change is needed. The key step towards the secondary phase of the change process is the acknowledgement that attitudes need to evolve and ideological barriers must be overcome for the implementation of new policies and models.

The presence of ideological barriers in the UK is visible in policy implementations. For example, at present (2001), the UK is the only EU member state which took up the option to allow opt-out agreements by employees from the Working Time Directive, so that employees can forgo their right to a maximum 48 hours working week. It is questionable whether employees are likely to opt-out due to employer coercion, or because they really want to work longer hours. It is noticeable that such attitudes are absent in other European States, and that other States have been more advanced than the UK in offering work-life policies.

Similarly, other countries have experimented with the possibilities of a shorter working week (Temperton and Jolivet, 2001), and the potential of such a shortening of work-time has long been recognised (Rifkins, 1995). In the UK, as in the USA, the belief is that fewer hours at existing pay could put companies at a competitive disadvantage globally.

As debated in Section 10.2, knowledge is the key to overcome organisational barriers. Exploring hindrances, and debating which barriers are perceived and which are factual, should generate such knowledge. For factual barriers (which are likely to affect the competitiveness of businesses) we need to know what circumstances distinguish the UK from those countries which are more open to such practices. Awareness of the influences of ‘ideological hegemony’ is essential. For ideological hindrances, the answer lies in solving the puzzle of how to create awareness of, and distribute knowledge effectively in order to overcome, the influence on *practices, techniques, methods, culture, behaviour, beliefs, tastes, desires, needs, perceptions, cognitions, and*

preferences (Smart, 1986:160; Lukes, 1974:24) created through two centuries of industrial ways of working.

Knowledge is also the guide to understand employee reluctance to utilise existing work-life policies. Once again, it is necessary to explore the employee response at different levels. For example, are individuals deterred in desiring work-life balance because of its negative effects on career progression, or is social identity more strongly associated with paid work in the UK than other countries and societies, and if so, why and at what cost to the society.

Thus, the government has a role to play in creating the ethics and a culture where sovereignty and status must not come from consumption, and where the individual's responsibility towards family, community and society is recognised and valued – a culture where the 'informed' individual is aware of the all-absorbing nature of post-industrial 'paid' work, and of the fact that psychological and material needs are unlimited. With this knowledge, individuals will be in a better position to draw boundaries between work and life, and develop a synergy that suits them.

Any change in ideology and culture is a gradual process. In the meantime, government must continue and advance its role in raising awareness of flexibility and work-life balance. The widely prevalent presentism culture needs to be tackled, and the fact that full-time flexible working options do not reduce the amount of work needing to be done should be recognised.

Greater awareness should be created about the benefits of reduced-time working options. Such options decrease the workload and stress of workers, create new jobs, and make it possible for certain sub-groups to join the labour force. They can meet social, family and school-related demands. Thus, the possibilities of a shorter working week should be considered. However, the option of reduced working time for all workers, especially without cuts in pay, and its implications, must be separated from promoting time-income trade-off options.

In time-income trade-off options, the status of the flexible worker needs to be improved. This requires more than legislation, and the prevention of direct exploitation

of such labour (e.g. The Part-Time Workers Regulations 2000). It demands a change in ideology and culture to prevent indirect mistreatment. Only such deep-rooted change can challenge scepticism that these alternatives seriously weaken the status of whole categories of the population.

For organisations, the government should continue and advance its support towards those organisations who want to provide flexibility, and scrutinise those who want to exploit the worker. It should recognise that for organisations, the key in providing flexibility is to find the balance between autonomy and control, and to do so, they need to have some space.

In summary, the present primary phase of change needs to move towards a secondary phase. To reach the final stage, using the definitions of Smart (1986:160) and Lukes (1974:24) once again, *practices, techniques, methods, culture, behaviour, beliefs, tastes, desires, needs, perceptions, cognitions, and preferences* need to be freed from the 'hegemony' and 'power' of industrial ways of working. To do so, government needs to increase the knowledge of the employee, employer, community and society on the necessity of combining sociological and macro-economic analysis in post-industrial society. In this new society, the structure of work-time should be balanced by influences that are socially and economically constructed.

10.5 CONTRIBUTION OF PRESENT RESEARCH

The focus of the majority of research on work-life has been on the advantages and disadvantages of flexible working. This project begins to uncover the deeper dynamics, hopefully stimulating thinking of other scholars to research additional dimensions of the topic.

The major contribution of this research is its two frameworks – Figure 3.1 and Figure 9.1. The first framework is based on the literature review, and presents the summary of changes in individuals and organisations which are leading towards the long-term development of work-life policies. The dynamics of this framework focus on changes inside the organisation. External factors are added to this framework in Figure 6.1.

which signify the necessity of explaining the intra-organisational dynamics in the institutional and environmental context.

The second framework (Figure 9.1) is based on the findings of the project. This is an extension of the first model, and makes it possible to understand differences between organisations in providing work-life policies.

The two frameworks are supplemented by a chronological charting (Figure 10.1) of the labour market and institutional forces that have brought changes in attitudes and policies in the work-life arena. Together, these three key figures develop an understanding of the past, present and future of work-life policies in the UK.

Power is the focus of this study and provides its underlying frameworks. This feature distinguishes the present study from all previous research on work-life. In attempting to understand power, the study supports the idea of Hardy and Clegg (1996) that

Power requires understanding in its diversity even as it resists explanation in terms of a singular theory. (Hardy and Clegg, 1996: 636)

Thus, to understand the long-term development of policies through power dynamics, various theories and concepts of power were explored (Hickson et al., 1971; Giddens, 1979; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991). The major finding of this research is the role of ideology and knowledge as the basis of power (Lukes, 1974; Gramsci, 1971; Ranson et al., 1980; Foucault, 1977, 1980), which hinders the growth of better work-life balance policies. Recognition of this dimension of power is predicted to accelerate the momentum in the adoption of new ways of working.

The research also stresses the complex and problematic nature of the term ‘flexibility’. It is recommended that the precise meaning of the term should be elaborated when used in research, and caution is observed about its definition when understanding the findings of other researchers. With this in mind, a significant finding is to show the relationships, or the lack of relationships, between types of flexible working and employee groups. This explains why the combining of flexible working practices has often led to misleading and controversial findings (e.g. Ingram and Simons, 1995;

Goodstein, 1994; Bardoel, 1998; Milliken, Martins and Morgan, 1998; Frone and Yardley, 1996). With regard to methodology, the research supports the advantages of case-study results, especially for the study of power relationships in organisations, as recommended by Eisenhardt (1989). Triangulation in the case-study analysis, which combines employee survey and management interviews, provides in-depth understanding of power relationships. It was because of this methodology that ideological barriers were uncovered, and the organisational response framework (Figure 9.1) was developed.

10.6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this project have emphasised the need for a macro-change in the society, and a micro-change in organisational processes. In its attempt to understand the possibilities of long-term development in work-life policies, it has provided an in-depth understanding of the research area. However, it has raised many new questions. This section discusses recommendations for further research.

The most obvious path to follow is the use of the research frameworks in further studies. There are many possibilities. The frameworks can be used in an open-minded fashion, to understand and chart developments taking place. Intra- and inter-organisational dynamics that may lead to further developments in the availability and take-up of work-life policies can be explored using these frameworks. Two particular projects are outlined below, which are of special interest to the researcher.

The organisational differences framework (Figure 9.1) is based on empirical work and speculation. A large-scale firm-level research project designed around this framework can test its validity, and provide more insight into the possibilities of long-term development of work-life policies. Such a project will need to rely on the concepts of power from the original framework, and the external factors, as added to Figure 6.1. Oliver's (1991) and Greenwood and Hinings's (1996) concepts of strategic response and intra-organisational dynamics can also prove helpful (see Section 9.3).

Further study of the organisational characteristics which were added to Figure 6.1 could be the basis of a separate study. Such a study would explore the effect of other

organisational employment policies, organisational culture, industrial sector, and organisational size on the adoption of work-life policies.

While the original framework (Figure 3.1) has looked at a wide range of factors, and added a complex and longitudinal perspective to the researched topic, parts of this framework may also be used to research the attitudes of narrower segments of the work population. One such project would be the effects of the broken psychological contract or redundancy on work-life attitudes and negotiating power perceptions. This dimension was not studied in this project because it requires a different research methodology. An observational and employee-interview-based study can explore the effects of these work-related characteristics on changing work-life attitudes.

While this project has tried to explore various angles and concepts of power, because of the complexity of power there are likely to be other uncovered angles. More research, whether using this study's frameworks or not, is needed to understand the role of power. Further research in different industrial sectors is one way to explore the additional dimensions of power, or to understand new dynamics of power relationships between the employee and employer. Another way is to study SMEs, where the nature of power relationships may be different.

The role of self-employment and temporary work in increasing the work-life balance of employees was briefly touched upon in the present study. Comparing the attitudes of these workers – who choose to take control of their work-life balance, rather than rely on organisations helping them – can provide an insight into the possibilities for the future.

One of the key findings of this project was the role of knowledge and ideological hegemony as a barrier to employee-friendly flexible working. This relationship can be explored further by scholars from different disciplines, who might approach the subject from different angles. For those who may choose to examine this relationship within organisations, the areas to focus might include managerial attitudes, and the attitudes of men and high-status employees towards reduced-hours flexible working options.

Managerial attitudes can also be studied from a critical theory perspective, as the groups whose thinking has been most influenced by socio-economic and political structures created through capitalism. Summarising the relevant data from this project, managers (and to a lesser degree professionals) face the highest conflict, and are least likely to desire flexibility or think that it can be beneficial to their work-life balance. These groups have always been referred to as the high-status, high-power groups, but they feel powerless when it comes to work-life balance. Thus, from the work-life perspective, they are the oppressed and deprived, unable to find their desired balance in their designated occupational groups.

Through chronological charting of the events relevant to work-life, this project has proposed that an atmosphere akin to a social movement is building up. There is growing interest in combining the study of social movements with organisational analysis (e.g. Lounsbury, 2001; Strang and Soule, 1998; Davis and Thompson, 1994). Thus, in contrast to the obvious path of using the frameworks developed here, new research may trace the development of work-life as a social movement, and/or its impact, in the guise of a social movement, on organisational policies and restructuring.

Finally, the UK's working culture and work-life ideologies need to be studied in more detail. Such a study may provide answers to the basic issues raised by the current research – for example, the underlying reasons why British work longest hours in Europe, and why employers and/or employees found it necessary to have the opt-out option in the Working Time Directive. What are the deeper work-life ideologies of the people of the UK? How can these be altered to accommodate a better work-life balance, or more significantly, should they be modified, or can they be profoundly altered without affecting global competitive advantage? The spectrum of areas explored in such a research project will be influenced by comparisons with Europe, the United States, and beyond.

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APPENDIX A – THE EMPLOYEE QUESTIONNAIRE

Lifestyle Rewards

Flexible working as a work-life policy

Dear respondent

This questionnaire forms part of the 'Lifestyle Rewards' study being carried out by the City University Business School and the Strategic Remuneration Research Centre.

The aim of the study is to find out if the needs, attitudes and expectations of individuals toward their work and life are changing, and if so, are organisations ready to accommodate this work-life alteration. The output of the project is likely to influence work-life policies offered by organisations in the future, specially the role that flexible working practices can play in supporting employees to achieve a balance between work and personal life demands.

This questionnaire has been distributed in 4 organisations, and will be supplemented by interviews of managers in the selected organisations. Your name has been selected systematically along with n other employees in your organisation, as well as a similar number of employees in the other organisations. It is important that you reply. Any information that you provide is confidential and shall only be used in aggregate form that can not be traced back to you in any way.

The questionnaire is divided into 5 sections. It will take 10-15 minutes of your time to complete the whole questionnaire. Your input is extremely important to the survey results and the outcome of the project to create a complete and realistic picture, and the time you spent filling the questionnaire would be much appreciated.

Thank you

Sadia Nadeem
SRRC Research Fellow (Lifestyle Rewards)
City University Business School

The aim of the study is to find out if the needs, attitudes and expectations of people towards their work and life are changing, and if so, are organisations ready to accommodate this work-life alteration. The questionnaire is divided into five sections which ask you about your work history, the type of contract you have with the organisation, the work-life policies offered by your organisation, the changes you are ready to make to accommodate your work-life requirements in the future, and finally a few questions about yourself.

Section A - Work History

This section asks you a few questions about your experiences at work.

A-1: How many years in total have you been working in this organisation?

Please tick one

- Less than 1 year ☐
- 1 to less than 2 years ☐
- 2 years to less than 5 years ☐
- 5 years to less than 10 years ☐
- 10 years or more ☐

A-2: What is the main reason for choosing your present job?

Please tick one

- It is the kind of work you wanted to do ☐
- It was convenient for personal reasons ☐
- To advance your career ☐
- It was the pay and conditions ☐
- By accident ☐
- Had no choice, it was the only job you could get ☐
- Other reasons (please tick and specify below) ☐

.....

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A-3: Have you ever been made redundant in your career?

Please tick

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

A-4: Have you been unemployed for more than 3 months in the last 5 years?

Please tick

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

A-5: Generally speaking, over the last 5 years, have you experienced an increase or decrease in the trends given below in your own job(s).

Please tick one in each row

	Increased	Is the Same	Decreased
Working hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Satisfaction with work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commitment to the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B - Type of Contract

This section will help us understand the type of contract you have with this organisation, and your point-of-view on non-standard contracts.

B-1: How many hours do you usually work each week (include any overtime, paid or unpaid).

.....hrs

B-2: What type of job contract do you have? Is this your own choice, the choice of your employer, or by mutual agreement?

Please tick (13-16)

	Own choice 1	Employer's choice 2	Mutual agreement 3
Permanent/ open-ended	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary/ fixed term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary through agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freelance/ self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B-3: Are you a full-time or part-time worker? Is this your own choice, the choice of your employer, or by mutual agreement?

Please tick (17)

	Own choice 1	Employer's choice 2	Mutual agreement 3
Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B-4: Have you worked on a non-standard or flexible contract, in this employment or another?

(18)

☐1 Yes (please complete B-4 and continue)

☐2 No (please go to B-5 and continue)

Please tick as many as applicable (19-30)

	In the last 5 years	In the last 10 years	At any time in your working life
Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary/ fixed term	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary through agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freelance/ self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B-5: Select the reasons why you would not like to work on a non-standard contract i.e. on a part-time, temporary or self-employed basis. Please complete whether you are employed on a standard or non-standard contract.

Please tick as many as applicable

	Part-time	Temporary	Self-employed
Effects on basic pay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effects on the benefits package	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of job security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reasons (please tick and specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....			
.....			
.....			

B-6: Select the reasons why you would like to work on a non-standard contract i.e. on a part-time, temporary or self-employed basis. Please complete whether you are employed on a standard or non-standard contract.

Please tick as many as applicable

	Part-time	Temporary	Self-employed
To have more control over your working time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To perform domestic commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To create a better balance between work and family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To pursue other outside work interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To allow time for studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To earn more money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reasons (please tick and specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Section C- Work-life policies

This section covers questions on flexible working options and work-life balance.

Flexible working options - definitions

Some new flexible working options give employees choice in rearranging their working time and working lives. Question C-1 asks questions about these options and the definitions of these options are given below

Flexi-time - work schedules that permit employees to choose their daily starting and quitting times within limits set by management.

Compressed work weeks - a standard workweek compressed into fewer than five days, e.g. 4 ½ day week or 9 day fortnight.

Part-time – working less than 30 hours per week

Voluntary reduced time - a time-income trade-off program that allows full-time employees to reduce work hours for a specified period of time with a corresponding reduction in compensation.

Job-sharing – two or more employees sharing one job.

Term time working - the employee remains on a permanent contract as either full- or part-time, but has the right to (unpaid) leave of absence during school holidays.

Home-working (f/t) - to be an employee (on any type of contract) of the organisation but work full-time from home

Home-working (p/t) - to distribute contracted working time between home and office.

Leave options - definitions

Extended leave options give employees choice in rearranging their working lives. The intention is that at some future date the employee will return to work with the same employer at either the same level or to the same job, retaining all or most of the service related benefits. Question C-2 asks questions about these options and the definitions of these options are given below

Extended maternity leave – maternity leave longer than the legally required 14 weeks.

Paternity leave – leave offered to working parents.

Sabbaticals - a period of paid/unpaid leave provided for social/educational purposes after a minimum length of service.

Career breaks – an unpaid leave taken in special circumstances.

C-1: Please tick which of the options given below are available to you in your place of work, and which options would you like to be made available in the future. You may tick more than one in each row.

	I use this option or have used it in the last 12 mths.	I don't use this option, but it is available to me	This option is not available to me	I want this option to be available to me now or in the future	I am not interested in this option
Flexi-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compressed work weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary reduced time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job-sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Term time working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home-working (f/t)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home-working (p/t)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C-2: Please tick which of the extended leave options given below are available to you in your place of work. You may tick more than one in each row.

	This option is available to me	This option is not available to me	I want this option to be available to me now or in the future	I am not interested in this option
Extended maternity leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paternity leave	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sabbaticals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career breaks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C-3: Are any flexible working options available to you?

- (96)

☐1

Yes (please answer C-3(a) and continue)
- ☐2

No (go to C-4 and continue)

C-3(a): Flexible working options have different significance for individuals. Please tick if you agree or disagree with the statements given below.

The availability of flexible working options:

	Strongly agree	Agree to some extent	Do not agree
	1	2	2
....attracted me to this organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....improves my satisfaction at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....helps me balance work and family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....improves my quality of personal life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....improves my quality of family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....helps reduce stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....helps me perform better in my job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....cuts down on my absenteeism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (please specify)			(106-109)

C-4: Please tick which of the statements given below you agree or disagree with, in order to help us understand the working atmosphere in your organisation.

	Strongly Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
The organisation actively promotes policies on flexible working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers are understanding about employees having to meet personal/family responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supervisors/managers would juggle schedules, tasks or duties to accommodate my personal/family responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peers are understanding about my having to meet personal/family responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C-5: Please tick to indicate if you agree or disagree with the statements given below, to help us understand your views on work-life.

	Strongly Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly disagree
The demands of my work interfere with my home and personal/family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working options can help me balance my work and personal life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working options are a good way to accommodate the needs of those with dependant care responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working options should be made available to all employees in the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is unfair that the organisation accommodates dependent care responsibilities of individuals, but takes lesser interest in accommodating other personal needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family friendly policies should be expanded to make them employee friendly policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section D – The Future
This section will help us understand the scope for development of flexible working options as work-life policies.

D-1: In general, how do you judge the following statements.

	Please tick one in each row				
	Strongly Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
I am very important to this organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My skills are very important for this organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am easily replaceable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My skills are easily replaceable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D-2: Would flexible working options that involve a trade-off between hours worked and income be attractive to you?

Please tick as many as applicable	
	Would be attractive
part-time/reduced time	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
job-sharing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
term-time working	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
taking a career break	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
none	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

D-3: If you had a choice, would you trade-off a proportion of your pay for more free time.

Please tick one only (127)	
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
5 percent less pay for 5 percent more free time	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
15 percent less pay for 15 percent more free time	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 percent less pay for 25 percent more free time	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
a larger trade-off than all the above for more free time	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

D-4: If your organisation is not ready to facilitate you in achieving work-life balance, which of the options given below would you choose?

Please tick one only	
Do nothing about it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Start looking for another job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leave for another similar job (but better work-life benefits)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leave for a job for which you are over-qualified but which has flexible working options	<input type="checkbox"/>
Become self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leave work/ paid work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (please tick and specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	
.....	
.....	
.....	
.....	

D-5: Are you aware of the work-life options available in other organisations?

Please tick	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D-6: Please rank the statements given below in order of importance (where 1=most important), to indicate who you feel has most responsibility to affect work-life issues.

	Ranking (1-4)
Organisations should help employees improve the balance between their work and personal life.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The individual is responsible for finding the job that best suits his/her work-life requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The government should introduce legislation to support organisations and individuals in creating better work-life balance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Unions should take an active lead in convincing employers to adapt employee friendly working options.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section E – You and Your Family
Finally, we would like you to answer some questions about yourself and your family (if applicable) so that we can group responses according to different choices.

For each question, please tick in one box only

Are you a male or female?

Male ☐ (135)

Female ☐ 2

How old are you?

20 or under ☐

21-30 ☐ 2

31-40 ☐ 3

41-50 ☐ 4

51-60 ☐ 5

over 60 ☐ 6

Which is the highest educational qualification you hold?

No qualifications ☐ (137)

CSE or equivalent/GCSE (grades D-G) ☐ 2

O level or equivalent/GCSE (grades A-C) ☐ 3

BTEC/NVQ level 3 ☐ 4

A level or equivalent ☐ 5

HND or NVQ 4 ☐

Degree or equivalent ☐ 6

Postgraduate degree or equivalent professional qualifications ☐ 7

Others ☐ 9
(please tick and specify)

.....(138)1
.....

Are you involved in further studies at present? (This does not include in-house training)

Please tick one only (139)

Yes, I am a full-time student ☐ 1

Yes, I am a part-time student ☐ 2

Yes, I am taking a short-course ☐ 3

No, I am not involved in any formal studies ☐ 4

Which of the following occupational groups best describes your job at present?

Please tick one only

Managers and senior administrators ☐
(e.g. general managers, marketing sales managers, director of nursing, works manager, bank manager)

Professionals ☐
(e.g. teachers, lecturers, lawyers, librarians, engineer, architect, doctor, accountant, social worker)

Associate professionals and Technicians ☐
(e.g. technician, nurse, musician, building inspector, computer programmer, insurance underwriter)

Clerical and Secretarial ☐
(e.g. typist, postal clerk, secretary, civil service and local government clerical officer, computer operator, bank clerk)

Craft and skill service ☐
(e.g. tool maker, electrician, fitter, motor mechanic, sewing machinist, printer, carpenter, baker)

Personal and Protective services ☐
(e.g. police officer, bar staff, hair dresser, undertaker, fire-fighter, child carer, waiter)

Sales ☐
(e.g. till operator, sales assistant, sales representative, petrol pump attendant)

Plant and Machine Operatives ☐
(e.g. assembly line worker, packer, truck driver, taxi or bus driver)

Others ☐
(e.g. cleaner, postal worker, shelf filler, kitchen hand, porter, builders labourer)

To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

White ☐

Afro-Caribbean ☐

Oriental/Chinese ☐

Asian ☐

Another ethnic group ☐

What is your gross annual income from your job in this organisation?

less than £10,000 ☐

£10,000 - £20,000 ☐

£20,000 - £30,000 ☐

£30,000 - £40,000 ☐

£40,000 - £50,000 ☐

£50,000 - £60,000 ☐

£60,000 - £70,000 ☐

more than £70,000 ☐

What is the approximate total annual income in your household (Please consider all sources such as spouses income/pension, income from saving schemes or shares, etc).

(143)

less than £15,000

☐

1

£15,000 - £30,000

☐

£30,000 - £45,000

☐

£45,000 - £60,000

☐

£60,000 - £75,000

☐

5

£75,000 - £90,000

☐

6

£90,000 - £105,000

☐

7

more than £105,000

☐

8

Which type of organisation do you work in
.....(144-145)
.....

Your family

What is your marital status?

(146)

Single

☐

1

Widowed

☐

Divorced/Separated

☐

Living with spouse or partner

☐

4

Does your spouse or partner work?

(147)

Don't have a spouse/partner

☐

1

No, s/he does not work

☐

2

No, s/he is a pensioner

☐

3

Yes, s/he works more than 30 hours a week

☐

4

Yes, s/he works less than 30 hours a week

☐

5

Do you earn more than your partner?

(148)

Yes

☐

1

No

☐

Indicate the number of dependant children you have in the following age groups?

Please write down the number

no dependant children

☐

aged 0-5

☐

aged 6-12

☐

aged 12-16

☐

aged 16-21

☐

Are you the primary caretaker of your child/children?

Yes

☐

No

☐

No dependant children

☐

Do you have any elderly dependants at home?

No elderly dependants

☐

One

☐

Two

☐

Are you the primary caretaker of the elderly at home?

Yes

☐

No

☐

No elderly dependant

☐

Do you have any sick or disabled relatives at home (who are not either children or elderly)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Are you the primary caretaker of the sick or disabled relative(s)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

No sick or disabled relative(s) at home

☐

Optional information for follow-up interviews

We may wish to do some follow up interviews. If you are willing to be interviewed, please give your name and your organisation's name. This would be treated in total confidence, as would the questionnaire data.

Name

Organisation's name

Telephone no. for direct contact.....

Do you have any further comments about work-life balance, and organisational policies affecting this? Please use the space below to give your views. (158)

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please return in the provided envelope by (date)

Return Address

APPENDIX B – THE ORGANISATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Lifestyle Rewards

Flexible working as a work-life policy

May 1999

Address

Dear Mr.

I am looking forward to our meeting on 25th May 1999. The interview to be conducted on this date forms part of the 'Lifestyle Rewards' study being carried out by the City University Business School and the Strategic Remuneration Research Centre. The aim of the study is to find out if the needs, attitudes and expectations of individuals towards their work and life are changing, and if so, are organisations ready to accommodate this work-life alteration. The focus of this study is the use of flexible working practices for better harmonisation of work and personal life.

Fieldwork is divided into three parts:

- Employee survey
- Organisational questionnaire
- Semi-structured interviews

I am enclosing the organisational questionnaire with this letter. This questionnaire will help me utilise the interview time in our forthcoming meeting in the most useful manner. It is designed to cover information on the use of flexible working options in your organisation. A large number of options are covered by the questionnaire, with their definitions attached as Appendix A. You will need to indicate which flexibility options are used by your organisation, and complete the reply-column relevant to these options.

The purpose of asking for the information covered by the questionnaire is three-folds. Firstly, it gives information from an organisational/managerial point-of-view to compare with the information obtained from the employee survey. Secondly, it will help differentiate organisational characteristics that may influence employee responses to the use of flexible working, and attitudes towards work-life. Finally, it sets the background for the interview which will follow this questionnaire in a few weeks time.

It will take approximately 15 minutes of your time to complete the whole questionnaire. Please complete at your earliest convenience, and return the questionnaire in the envelope provided. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries. I am extremely grateful for your co-operation, and am looking forward to our forthcoming discussion.

Sincerely

Sadia Nadeem
SRRRC Research Fellow (Lifestyle Rewards)
City University Business School

INTERNAL FLEXIBILITY OPTIONS
(full-time workers)

Please reply to question 1 to indicate if an option is used in your organisation or not, and
If yes, please complete questions 2-7 for the relevant option(s) by using

Y for yes
N for no, and
DK for don't know

	Flexi-time	Compressed week	Home-working
1- Which of the internal flexibility options given above are used in your organisations?			
Yes			
No			
Don't Know			

2- Is it a formal or informal arrangement?			
Written policy			
At discretion of individual manager			

3- How widely is it used in the organisation?			
Company wide			
Not company wide			
Limited sites			
Pilot schemes			

4- How long have you had this practice in the organisation?			
Less than 1 year			
1 year to 2 years			
2 years to 5 years			
5 years to 10 years			
More than 10 years			

5- Who does these options apply to?			
Managers			
Professionals			
Ass. Prof./Technicians			
Clerical and Secretarial			
Personal & Protective services			
Sales			
Plant & Machine Operatives			
Others			

6- Whose choice is it to shift to alternative schedules, the employer's or the employee's?			
Employer			
Employee			
Either party			

7- Please tick in the appropriate boxes to explain the characteristics of particular flexible working practices.			
	Length of flexband <input type="checkbox"/> 120 min or more <input type="checkbox"/> 60-119 min <input type="checkbox"/> 30-59 min <input type="checkbox"/> less than 30 min <input type="checkbox"/> Pilot	Time <input type="checkbox"/> 3 day schedule <input type="checkbox"/> 4 ½ day week <input type="checkbox"/> 9 day fortnight <input type="checkbox"/> any amount	Time <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input type="checkbox"/> More that 2 days <input type="checkbox"/> 2 days or 1day <input type="checkbox"/> few hours

INTERNAL FLEXIBILITY OPTIONS
(reduced-hours workers)

Please reply to question 1 to indicate if an option is used in your organisation or not, and
If yes, please complete questions 2-7 for the relevant option(s) by using
Y for yes
N for no, and
DK for don't know

	Part-time	Job sharing	Voluntary reduced time	Term-time working
1- Which of the internal flexibility options given above are used in your organisations?				
Yes				
No				
Don't know				
2- Is it a formal or informal arrangement?				
Written policy				
At discretion of individual manager				
3- How widely is it used in the organisation?				
Company wide				
Not company wide				
Limited sites				
Pilot schemes				
4- How long have you had this practice in the organisation?				
Less than 1 year				
1 year to 2 years				
2 years to 5 years				
5 years to 10 years				
More than 10 years				
5- Who does these options apply to?				
Managers				
Professionals				
Ass. Prof./Technicians				
Clerical and Secretarial				
Personal & Protective services				
Sales				
Plant & Machine Operatives				
Others				
6- Whose choice is it to shift to alternative schedules, the employer's or the employee's?				
Employer				
Employee				
Either party				
7- Please tick in the appropriate boxes to explain the characteristics of particular flexible working practices.				
	Hours: <input type="checkbox"/> 30-16 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 16 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Any amount	Hours: <input type="checkbox"/> 30-16 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 16 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Any amount	Hours <input type="checkbox"/> 35-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 30-35 <input type="checkbox"/> any amount Time <input type="checkbox"/> More than 1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year to 6 months <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 6 months	

LEAVES

Please reply to question 1 to indicate if an option is used in your organisation or not, and
If yes, please complete questions 2-8 for the relevant option(s) by using
Y for yes
N for no, and
DK for don't know

	Maternity	Paternity	Sabbaticals	Career break
1- Which of the leave options given above are used in your organisations?				
Yes				
No				
Don't know				
2- Is it a formal or informal arrangement?				
Written policy				
At discretion of individual manager				
3- How widely is it used in the organisation?				
Company wide				
Not company wide				
Limited sites				
Pilot				
4- How long have you had this practice in the organisation?				
Less than 1 year				
1 year to 2 years				
2 years to 5 years				
5 years to 10 years				
More than 10 years				
5- Who does it apply to?				
Managers				
Professionals				
Ass. Prof./Technicians				
Clerical and Secretarial				
Personal & Protective services				
Sales				
Plant & Machine Operatives				
Others				
6- What is the minimum length of service before this option is available?				
10 years or more				
10-5 years				
5-2 years				
less than 2 years				
7- What is the maximum length of leave?				
5years to 2 years				
2 years to 12 months				
12 months or longer				
12-6 months				
6-1 months				
1 month to 5 days				
less than 5 days				
8- How are the pay and benefits affected?				
Pay				
Paid leave				
Partially paid leave				
Unpaid leave				
Benefits				
Full				
Some				
None				

NON-STANDARD CONTRACTS

Please reply to question 1 to indicate if an option is used in your organisation or not, and
If yes, please complete questions 2-6 for the relevant option(s) by using
Y for yes
N for no, and
DK for don't know

	Temp/fixed term	Agency-temp	Freelance/self-employed	Part-time
1- Which of the atypical working options given above used in your organisation?				
Yes				
No				
Don't know				

2- What is the percentage of individuals employed under these types of contracts?				
Less than 1%				
1% to 5%				
5% to 10%				
10% to 20 %				
20% to 50%				
More than 50%				

3- Are they used in all workplaces of the organisation?				
Company wide				
Not company wide				
Limited sites				
Pilot				

4- Which occupational groups are they mostly concentrated in?				
Managers				
Professionals				
Ass. Prof./Technicians				
Clerical and Secretarial				
Personal & Protective services				
Sales				
Plant & Machine Operatives				
Others				

5- Are these contracts the choice of the employer or the employee?				
Employer				
Employee				
Both parties				

6- How do the pay and benefits of these atypical workers compare with the pay and benefits offered to full-time permanent employees doing same/similar jobs?				
Basis Pay				
Higher				
Same				
Lower				
Benefits				
More				
Same				
Lower				
None				

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS

FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

Flexi-time - work schedules that permit employees to choose their daily starting and quitting times within limits set by management.

Compressed work weeks - a standard workweek compressed into fewer than five days, e.g. 3 day week, 4 ½ day week or 9 day fortnight.

Home-working - to be an employee (on any type of contract) of the organisation but work either full-time from home, or distribute contracted working time between home and office.

Part-time – working less than 30 hours per week

Job-sharing – two or more employees sharing one job, where benefits and salary are prorated according to what each person would be paid as a full-time employee.

Voluntary reduced time - a time-income trade-off program that allows full-time employees to reduce work hours for a specified period of time with a corresponding reduction in compensation.

Term time working - the employee remains on a permanent contract as either full- or part-time, but has the right to (unpaid) leave of absence during school holidays.

LEAVE OPTIONS

Extended leave options give employees choice in rearranging their working lives. The intention is that at some future date the employee will return to work with the same employer at either the same level or to the same job, retaining all or most of the service related benefits.

Maternity leave – leave offered to mothers at the time of birth of child.

Paternity leave – leave offered to working parents.

Sabbaticals - a period of paid/unpaid leave provided for social/educational purposes after a minimum length of service.

Career breaks – an unpaid leave taken in special circumstances.

APPENDIX C – THE MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW

FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE

1. Why has your organisation introduced the various flexible working options identified in the organisational survey?
2. Is there a true demand for (more) flexibility? If so, is the organisation going to expand its use of flexibility?
3. What is the cost in providing employees with the flexibility they are requesting?
4. What are the benefits of introducing flexibility to the organisation? How does the organisation measure these benefits?
5. Do you regard your organisation as a progressive employer?
6. What policies or practices do you have (apart from flexible working arrangements) which you see as part of being a progressive employer?
7. What is your organisation's philosophy regarding work-life balance?
8. What other family friendly policies do you offer? e.g. dependant care, employee assistance programs.
9. How do you see the company's philosophy and policies relating to work-life balance and the family developing over the next 3 years or so?
10. Are you aware of what your competitors and other organisations are offering in terms of work-life policies?

NEGOTIATING POWER

11. Are issues of work-life balance driven by:
- The needs of those with dependant care responsibilities,
 - The desire of the younger generation (Generation X), or
 - All employees?
12. Why are flexible working arrangements and benefits available to some groups and not others/ to all. (see organisational questionnaire)
13. If the need/desire for flexibility of the individual is different to that offered by the organisation there is a conflict of interests. How this is resolved may depend on the 'negotiating power' of the individual. In your opinion, which if any, of the factors below affect the 'negotiating power' of the individual. Can you explain how?
- Centrality of the individual/group in terms of the knowledge and skills they bring to the organisation
 - The demographic group to which the individual belongs (e.g. external support for women, specially with young children, by the government and pressure groups affect their negotiating ability.
 - The type of work done by the individual i.e. if the work can be done as easily under a flexible working contract as opposed to a standard contract.
 - The power and membership of Trade Union in the organisation.
 - What other organisations are offering (as role models or competitors for staff).
14. Which broader factors do you think influence the negotiating power between the individual and the organisation? Discussions on:
- Economic cycle
 - Influences from Europe, through (e.g.) through the social chapter or through people being aware of the social demographic systems in some European countries.
 - Political climate - Labour versus conservative
 - Change in social values
15. Any other comments on the idea of negotiating power as a factor influencing the adoption of work-life or family-friendly policies?
16. Do you have any views on the relative responsibilities of organisations, individuals, the government, and trade unions to create better harmonisation of personal and working life.